OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

# retro GAMER

**ULTIMATE GUIDE: MORTAL KOMBAT 3**
THE KONVERSIONS AND KHARACTERS OF MIDWAY'S KILLER ARCADE SEQUEL

**THE MAKING OF BULLY**
18-HOUR SHIFTS AND BURNOUT: BACK TO SCHOOL AT ROCKSTAR

## 25 YEARS OF EPIC BATTLES

# TOTAL WAR

**FROM HISTORICAL WARFARE TO FANTASY CONFLICTS:** GENERALS FROM CREATIVE ASSEMBLY REFLECT ON THEIR GROUND-BREAKING SERIES

**THE MAKING OF THE CHAOS ENGINE 2**
REVISITING THE SLICK SEQUEL WITH MIKE MONTGOMERY

**WORLD SERIES BASEBALL**
THE SMALL BRITISH TEAM THAT SCORED A HOME RUN

FUTURE
LOAD 277

**MAGAZINE CRAFT: JUSTIN LEEPER**
GAME INFORMER, WRESTLING AND ACTING FOR HIDEO KOJIMA

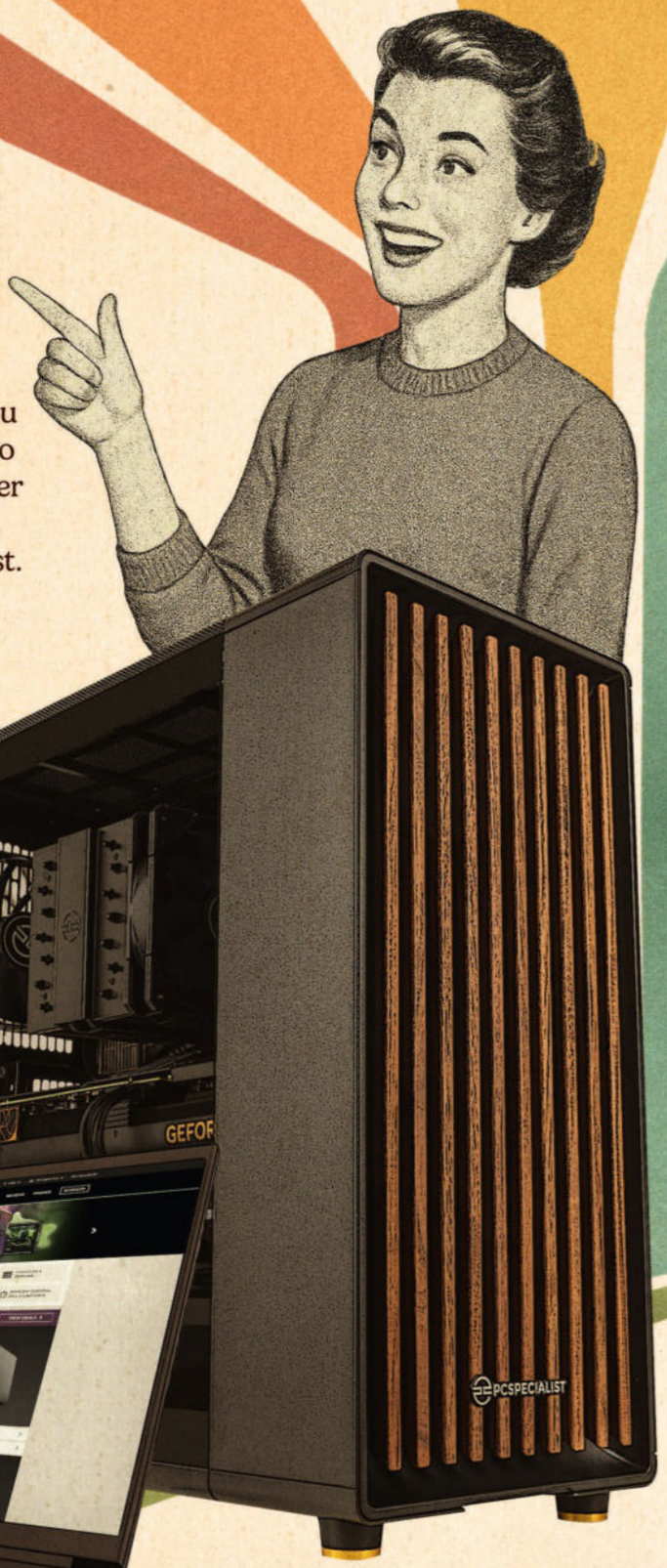
**THE HISTORY OF HERETIC**
INSIDE RAVEN SOFTWARE'S CULT SUPERNATURAL FPS

*Made to Order*
*—Made For You!*

At last — a computer made just for you! With PCSpecialist, you can pick the parts you need and we'll build a custom PC or laptop to suit your work, play, or everyday life. Whether it's blazing-fast speed or top-notch graphics, simply choose your style and we'll do the rest. It's the modern way to buy a machine.

Visit **www.pcspecialist.co.uk** today!

# The UK's Favourite System Builder.




✓ *Built to order*
✓ *UK-based support*
✓ *Delivered to your door*

**GET AN EXCLUSIVE £20 DISCOUNT**
*with Retro Gamer using code RTG25*

PCSPECIALIST

# THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ELITE SYSTEMS GAME?

## DARRAN JONES

I'm going to go for *Kokotoni Wilf*, I loved the level with dinosaurs in it and found the name hilariously surreal.
**Expertise:** Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
**Currently playing:**
*Gradius Origins*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

## TIM EMPEY

My brother and I put our pocket money together to buy *Space Harrier* for the Commodore 64 in Boots in Belfast for the princely sum of £9.99. Thankfully it's a great conversion.
**Expertise:** Finishing Game Pass games before they go
**Currently playing:**
*Dragon Age: The Veilguard*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*God Hand*

## NICK THORPE

Being a Sega console kid, I didn't play many of Elite's games back in the day, but I find that I'll always stop and play *Batty* whenever I see it at retro gaming events.
**Expertise:** Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
**Currently playing:**
*Sakura Wars*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Sonic The Hedgehog*

## ANDY SALTER

After playing *Striker* on the SNES at a friend's house I had to wait until the following year to get *Ultimate Soccer* for my Mega Drive.
**Expertise:** Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
**Currently modding:**
*RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

## PAUL ROSE

I'd be lying if I didn't say that the one I played the most was *Spacer Harrier* on the Spectrum. A stunning conversion!
**Expertise:** Winging it
**Currently playing:**
*Angry Birds Bounce*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Half-Life 2*

## GRAEME MASON

*Bomb Jack*, the ZX Spectrum's greatest arcade conversion.
**Expertise:** Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
**Currently playing:**
*Streets Of Rage 4*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Resident Evil 4*

## MARTYN CARROLL

Most of Elite's early coin-op conversions were punching, but *Space Harrier* on the Spectrum was in a completely different league.
**Expertise:** Sinclair stuff
**Currently playing:**
*Luigi's Mansion 2 HD*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Jet Set Willy*

## ANDREW FISHER

*Buggy Boy* on the Commodore 64 – the brilliant, playable and fast-moving conversion by Dave and Bob Thomas.
**Expertise:** Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
**Currently playing:**
*Project X: Light Years*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Wizball*

## RORY MILNE

I admire Elite for the sheer ambition of squeezing *Space Harrier* into the humble Spectrum. There were concessions galore, but the gameplay remained intact.
**Expertise:** The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
**Currently playing:**
*Wolfenstein 3D*
**Favourite game of all time:**
*Tempest*

# LOADING...

**The *Total War* series first thundered onto PCs with the release of *Shogun: Total War* and it remains one of the biggest franchises on the system.** Developed by Creative Assembly, the strategic hit has been wowing gamers for 25 years and has allowed them to recreate some of the most iconic battles of all time. It's an honour then to chat to long-standing members of the studio and cover the many great games that make up the series, from the original *Shogun* to the latest release *Pharaoh*.

Other highlights in this issue include a behind-the-scenes examination of Rockstar's *Bully*, the evolution of Raven Software's *Heretic* and *Hexen* games, the difficulties of creating a sequel to *The Chaos Engine* and an in-depth look at the gore-filled *Mortal Kombat 3*. We also look at the many great games of Elite Systems, chat to Justin Leeper about his fascinating career and find out how Big Ape Productions created *Star Wars: Episode 1 - The Phantom Menace*, despite seeing very little of the movie.

And make sure you head on over to page 44 and take out a subscription to the magazine, as we are currently offering an impressive 40% discount to any new subscribers.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

# CONTENTS

**>> Load** 277 Breathing new life into classic games

## RETRO RADAR


6 **Main News**
Randal Linden tells us about his SNES update of *Doom* for Limited Run Games

8 **Mike Mika**
A game of *Bruce Lee* with his son sent Mike back to his past

9 **News Wall**
New Evercade releases, an incoming *Mega Man* Blu-Ray and a brand-new *He-Man* game are all on the way

10 **Iain Lee**
This month sees Iain craving the simple gaming pleasures in life

12 **Mr Biffo**
Paul feels that not all 'good' games of the past still hold up today

14 **A Moment With**
Find out why Kevin Toms has made a new football management game

18 **Back To The Noughties**
It's April 2009 and Nick is on another exciting mission in gaming's past


## REVIVALS


36 **Power Drift**
A post on RLLMUK led to Darran reminiscing about this rather spectacular C64 conversion

76 **Virtual Boy Wario Land**
Nick makes a case for this interesting Virtual Boy gem

90 **Stone Keep**
Darran remembers how the FMV intro from this PC dungeon crawler really left an impression on him

112 **Space Invaders Extreme**
Nick gets nostalgic about this excellent PSP update of Taito's classic game

## FEATURED


32 **The Making Of: World Series Baseball**
Find out how a small development team crammed an entire baseball pitch into various 8-bit computers

38 **The Retro Gamer Guide To: Elite Systems**
Our legacy feature highlights some of Elite's greatest games. How many did you get to play?

46 **The Making Of: The Chaos Engine 2**
Mike Montgomery on the creation of an entertaining sequel that arrived a little too late to find its deserved success

50 **Covermount Corner: ST Format #30**
This month James Konik plays demos of *Populous 2* and *Baby Jo*

52 **Magazine Craft: Justin Leeper**
From working on mags to acting for Hideo Kojima and writing stories for wrestling games, Justin has done it all

58 **Retro Inspired: SenXin Aleste**
Thomas Nickel quizzes M2 developers about their super-charged arcade game

66 **Hardware Heaven: Game Boy Pocket**
Nick takes a brief look at Nintendo's attempt to downsize its Game Boy

78 **The Making Of: Star Wars: Episode 1 - The Phantom Menace**
Find out how tight time limits and little studio access helped shape this digital take on George Lucas' first prequel film

82 **Music Memories: Metropolis Street Racer**
The legendary composer Richard Jacques get quizzed about his musical duties on Bizarre's arcade racer

**25 Years Of Epic Battles: Total War**
Generals from the world-conquering PC series look back at the evolution of the popular franchise

**Ultimate Guide: Mortal Kombat 3**
Martyn Carroll fights his way through the third game in Midway's gory series

Don't forget to follow us online for all your latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamermag.bsky.social

Retro Gamer Magazine | @RetroGamerMag | retrogamer@futurenet.com

SAVE UP TO 40% SUBSCRIPTION SEE PAGE 44

84 **The Making Of: Bully**
Discover the challenges and difficulties of bringing *GTA*-style vibes to the schoolyard

104 **Gaming Grails: Rapid Reload**

## REVIEWS

92 Shinobi: Art Of Vengeance
94 Gradius Origins
94 Ninja Gaiden: Ragebound
94 Operation Night Strikers
94 Heretic + Hexen

## ESSENTIALS

96 **Homebrew**
Even a trip to hospital can't stop Andrew's coverage of the scene

100 **Hot Topic: It's Totally War**
Andy is drafted in to teach the team about the iconic *Total War* series

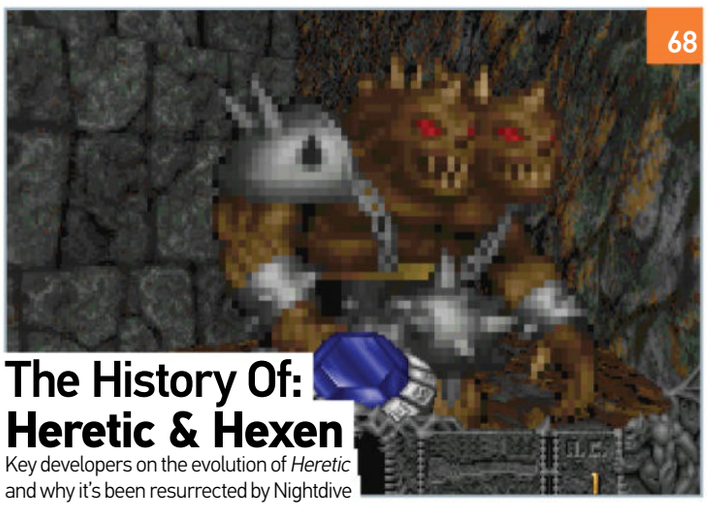
102 **Collector's Corner**
We've another great collection for you, as well as the latest prices for featured games in this issue

106 **My Retro Life**
Some personal archive scanning has led Nick to sharing many of his gaming memories that were caught on camera

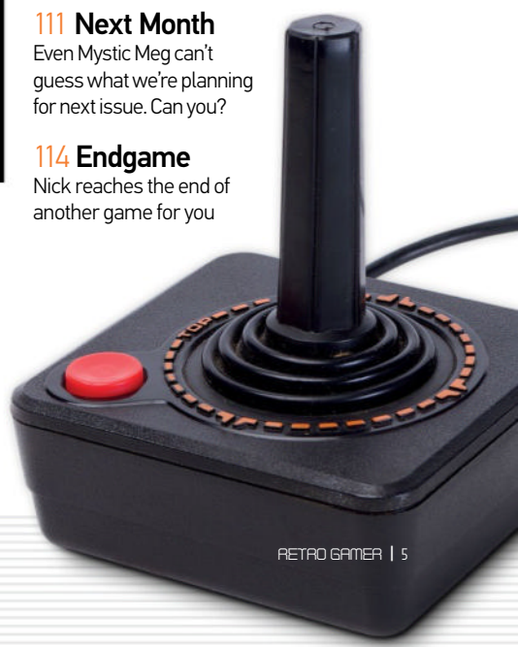
108 **Mailbag**
Fancy earning a retro bookazine? Send us a letter and yours may get picked

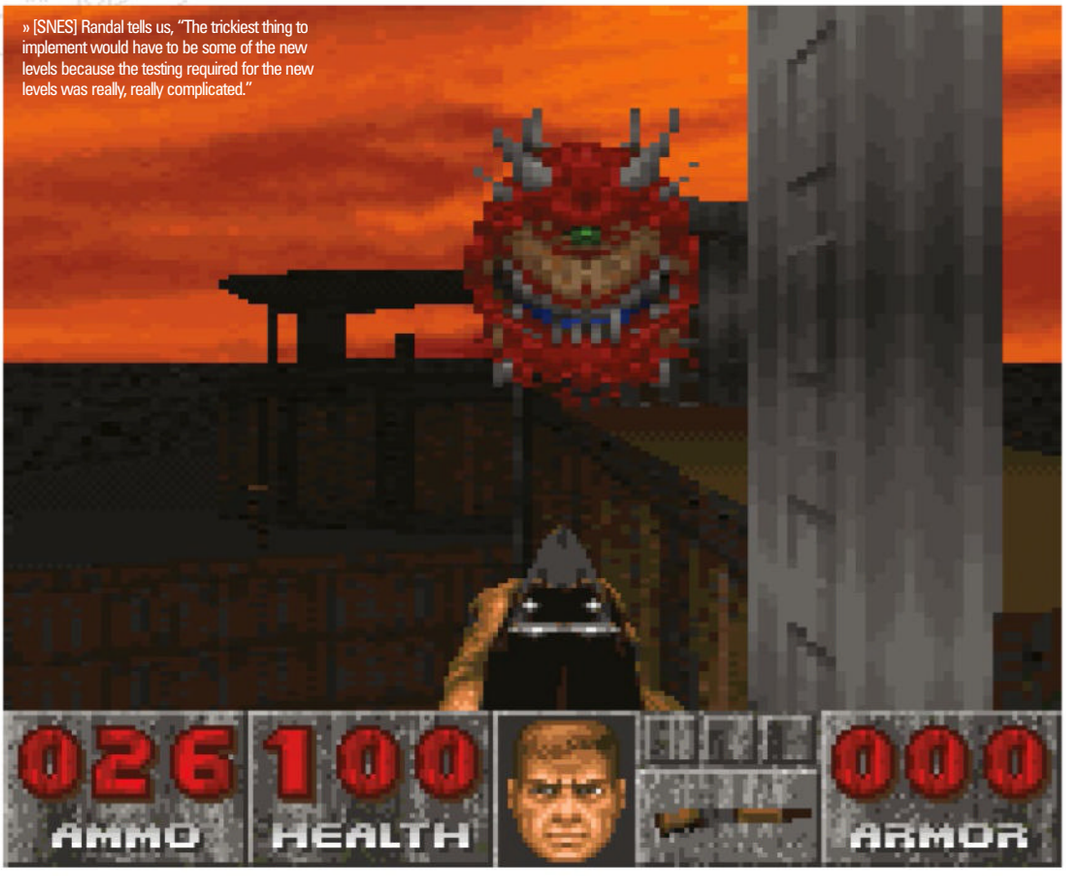
111 **Next Month**
Even Mystic Meg can't guess what we're planning for next issue. Can you?

114 **Endgame**
Nick reaches the end of another game for you



68 **The History Of: Heretic & Hexen**
Key developers on the evolution of *Heretic* and why it's been resurrected by Nightdive






» [SNES] Randal tells us, "The trickiest thing to implement would have to be some of the new levels because the testing required for the new levels was really, really complicated."

» [SNES] With regards to the Raspberry Pi use Randal says, "We're actually emulating the Super FX chipset. So the part of the program that runs on the Super Nintendo doesn't know that it's not actually talking to a Super FX chip."

## CONTENTS

**6 A SNESATIONAL PORT**
Randal Linden on revisiting his SNES port of *Doom* and updating it after three long decades

**8 MIKE MIKA**
This month Mike shares a rather bittersweet tale concerning the iconic *Bruce Lee* game

**9 NEWS WALL**
Lots of cool stuff, from Evercade carts by Rare, Activision and Llamasoft to a brand-new *He-Man* game

**10 IAIN LEE**
Is it *Bust-A-Move* or *Puzzle Bobble*? Iain thinks it's brilliant, regardless of its name

**12 MR BIFFO**
Paul is shooting sacred cows this month and no classic game is safe from his roving sights

**14 A MOMENT WITH**
David Crookes discusses tactics with Kevin Toms who has just finished his new football management game

**18 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES**
Nick went back to the year 2000 and didn't like it, so travelled to April 2009 instead

# A SNESATIONAL PORT

## Randal Linden on revisiting his astonishing SNES port of Doom and making it even better

**When it comes to technical wizardry, Randal Linden is something of an expert.** From *Dragon's Lair* on the Amiga to *Doom* on the SNES, Randal has become synonymous with 'impossible ports'.

The SNES version of *Doom* is arguably one of his most impressive achievements and it all started off when Sculptured Software was invited to Nintendo's Redmond office where he witnessed an early prototype of *Star Fox*. "It got a standing ovation from the crowd," recalls Randal, "it was all high-end developers there."

Sculptured Software was keen to create a 3D dirt bike game using the new Super FX chip but didn't have a suitable development system. After speaking to John Morgan, Randal was roped in as John knew he had a suitable development system. "I got pulled into the project and I had this development system that ran on the Amiga, believe it or not," Randal tells us. "The development system is an assembler, linker and source-level debugger. And I came up with this idea that we called the Romulator."

After acquiring a couple of retail *Star Fox* games and desoldering the ROM and replacing it with RAM and a small boot monitor, the team were effectively able to make a Super FX game without having a development kit. Working in his spare time, Randal needed a test game which led to him picking *Doom*. "I put together a prototype of *Doom* running using my own engine called the Reality Engine," he says, which impressed Sculptured Software so much it looked into licensing the game.

As impressive as Randal's *Doom* port was, it wasn't without its issues. "The maximum size of a Super FX cartridge back then was 2MB, so there was only so much space that was available," says Randal. With *Doom* being a far larger game, Randal started making sacrifices. "One of the first things that got cut was levels. Then I cut down the monsters and the objects so they're always facing you."

» Randal Linden has spearheaded the new *Doom* SNES project but also worked with several level editors, Damifortune (music), Retro-Bit (rumble pad), Bitmap Bureau (hardware design) and Limited Run Games (production).

Randal also decided to cut down floors and ceilings and made floors and ceilings dithered, which all helped with the memory issues he faced, but not with the game's speed. "Even though the Super FX runs at 21MHz, it's still slow because it's running on a 16-bit co-processor, but communicating over an 8-bit data bus," he explains. "So, I came up with a really convoluted way of doing a double buffer because there wasn't enough VRAM on the Super Nintendo." This allowed Randal

» [SNES] "When you shoot the shotgun, you'll feel the recoil mostly on the right side. Then the shell ejects mostly on the left side." Randal explains how *Doom*'s new rumble works.

» [SNES] The new SNES *Doom* has been a universal project with Randal telling us, "We've got people in Amsterdam, France, Germany, Norway, America and Canada. It was a global product"

» Randal tells us that the new Retro-Bit rumble controller is modelled on an existing pad but has "deeper pockets to hold the rumble motors in".

» [SNES] If *Doom* proves to be a success Randal is already considering doing something similar with *Doom 2* and *Heretic*.

to achieve a higher framerate and the SNES port of *Doom* eventually went on to achieve great acclaim.

**So what made Randal want to update his old game?** "I did an interview on Digital Foundry with John Linneman and Audi Sorlie and they asked me all sorts of questions about my history, about *Dragon's Lair* and about *Doom*," he says. Sorlie, who was working with Limited Run Games then came back with an unusual request. "'[He asked], 'Can you go back and add things that you didn't have time for or that were missed or make improvements to it? But it still has to run on the Super Nintendo.'" Randal quickly agreed and started digging in, noting that while "code was fairly well documented, reading some of the code was like a head scratcher. It was very, very tricky code sometimes, all owing to the optimisations that were necessary".

Two additional aspects have made this new version of *Doom* possible: the inclusion of a Raspberry Pi and help from Bitmap Bureau which was responsible for the hardware design. "They did a fantastic job," Randal tells us. "When you take the cartridge out of the shell and look at it, the hardware is super clean, very, very high quality. It's using a state-of-the-art Raspberry Pi, which is amazing."

> "I put together a prototype of Doom running using my own engine called the Reality Engine"
> **RANDAL LINDEN**

The enhanced hardware has allowed Randal to add numerous things, from the original missing levels, FMV intro sequences, an improved framerate and much more. The biggest inclusion is Episode 4, which caused additional issues for Randal. "These levels were actually more complicated because Episode 4 used a lot of new line definitions like the platform moving and the crushing ceilings. These new levels started using them because they had access to the *Doom II* engine at the time."

Another impressive addition is rumble support via a new pad from Retro-Bit. It's extremely effective and adds further to what is an already immersive experience. "I sort of wanted to do a dual rumble where it's got rumble on the left and rumble on the right, and you can basically play waveforms and all sorts of cool stuff like that," Randal tells us about the decision. The documentation has also been released onto GitHub where Randal says it's already been incorporated into emulators like Mesen and Ares.

*Doom* on the SNES has come a long way since Randal first tackled it in the Nineties and he's pleased to see it's now reaching a new audience. You'll be able to see the fruits of his labours when it finally makes its debut in 2026.

## SYSTEM 3 ENHANCED

The new website for System 3 is now officially updated and is filled with incoming news from the publisher, as well as merchandise and games that you can buy. To celebrate the occasion System 3 is giving **Retro Gamer** readers a rather generous 15% off their first purchase. Head to shop.system3.com and use the code retrogamermag15. Hurry, as the deal only lasts until 22 October.

## A MINI VECTREX?

One of gaming's coolest consoles is due to be revived via a Kickstarter shortly. Recently shown off at Gamescom, and planned for a November Kickstarter, the Vectrex Mini will feature 12 built-in games (with support for more), sport a 5-inch AMOLED screen and will be priced at 149 Euros for the standard unit. More news on this exciting new system when we get it.

**Who is Mike Mika?**
Mike Mika's official videogame career began in the Nineties, working on Game Boy Color titles like *Klax* and *Alice In Wonderland*. He's now the studio head of Digital Eclipse, a studio acclaimed for its reverential treatment of classic games.

# Green Yamo and me

**I grew up with the usual suburban trappings of the Eighties: rusty dirt bikes, questionably engineered tree forts and summer adventures that ended in the ER so often everyone knew our names.** And then we had him.

He was the kind of kid who, when handed a water gun, thought, "This would be better filled with urine." Dodgeball? He never went for the torso. He went straight for the groin, every… damn… time. It didn't take long to realise there was no bottom to the well of his demented imagination. We absolutely hated him.

And yet, sometimes, he surprised us. Like the afternoon he hauled his older brother's painstakingly assembled World War II models onto the lawn, crammed them with firecrackers of dubious legality, and blew them to smithereens. It was mayhem, sure, but there was a lunatic joy in the way he did it. When his brother inevitably pounded him, he took the beating with something that looked disturbingly like pride.

Then one day he singled me out. I braced myself – running would only delay the inevitable. But instead of torment, he pulled me inside to show off his new home computer: the Atari 800XL. For the first time, I saw *Choplifter*, where POWs actually looked human, and *Tales Of The Beta Lyrae*, whose title music I still whistle decades later. My 2600 felt like a toy after that. He insisted we play *Rescue On Fractalus!*. We played it in the dark while he grinned, waiting for the alien to slam against the windshield. I nearly pissed myself. Were we bonding? In a strange way, yes.

> "We played it in the dark while he grinned, waiting for the alien to slam against the windshield. I nearly pissed myself"

His true favourite, though, was *Bruce Lee*. A two-player game, he always gave me Bruce. He took the hulking green sidekick, and instead of helping, would suddenly punch me in the face or kick me off a ledge, wheezing with laughter. It was a ridiculous, high-pitched laugh that took over his whole body, and you just couldn't resist it. You laughed too, even as you died for the hundredth time. It was then I began to see what I hadn't before.

He was almost always home alone. Both parents worked long hours, his brothers were older and gone, and I often saw him through the kitchen window making his own dinner, eating it in silence. He didn't talk about his family much. In truth, he didn't have to. You could feel the absence, the weight of it, in the way he clung to us.

By the time we were teenagers, he was a fixture in every one of my birthday photos – sometimes smiling, sometimes flipping off the camera to my parents' dismay. He didn't always fit, but he was always there.

**A few years back, a friend called with the news.** He was gone. Not from illness or accident. He had left this world on his own terms.

The bully of my childhood – the boy who used to throw dog poop at the little kid who lived behind his house for no particular reason at all, who could send us into hysterics with his demented sense of fun – was, in the end, the lonely kid who never managed to connect with his family, who never found peace with who he was.

A couple of years ago, I dug out some of those old games and convinced my son to play *Bruce Lee* with me. I gave him Bruce, of course, and took the Green Yamo. We fought off ninjas, made steady progress, and then, just as we were about to beat the game, I jump-kicked him in the face and sent him plummeting to his death. My son stormed out of the room, furious, but all I could do was smile.

The deepest cruelty is loneliness. Yet games, in their strange magic, return us to the joy we once shared with those we've lost. And as the past rushed back, I heard it again – that ridiculous, high-pitched laugh, filling the room as if he'd never left. ✱

## Do you agree with Mike's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK | retrogamermag.bsky.social | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@futurenet.com

» Many Activision games are among the Atari 2600's finest releases, so we're looking forward to this.

» It's great to see Jeff Minter's back catalogue being celebrated so widely in recent times.

# EVERCADE EXCESS

## EXCITING NEW CARTS SET TO ARRIVE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

**The latest Evercade cartridges have been announced for release in November, and they're rather exciting additions to the library.** *Activision Collection 1* is said to be the first of three from the world's first third-party games publisher, and includes 15 early games such as *Enduro*, *Pitfall!* and *River Raid*. The *Llamasoft Collection* includes 27 games from Jeff Minter's early years, including *Gridrunner*, *Revenge Of The Mutant Camels* and *Llamatron: 2112*, and *Rare Collection 1* contains 12 games including *Jetpac*, *Knight Lore* and *Battletoads*. They'll be available for the usual £19.99/€24.99/$29.99.

Unfortunately for American customers, Evercade retailer Funstock has paused orders to the USA "due to the suspension of the De Minimis exemption and courier service updates", and noted that, "A 30% import fee now applies to products (made in China). At this time, we cannot offer the service for customers to pay this cost to us ahead of shipment." Readers in the USA are advised to closely follow updates from retailers.

» [PC] This gives us some *Golden Axe* vibes. That wouldn't be a bad game to imitate at all.

# BY THE POWER OF GRAYSKULL!

## HE-MAN AND FRIENDS IN BEAT-'EM-UP REVIVAL

**Bitmap Bureau has clearly been busy, as it has announced *He-Man And The Masters Of The Universe: Dragon Pearl Of Destruction*.** The game adapts the hit Eighties toy line and cartoon into a brand-new 2D beat-'em-up, building on the expertise the studio gained with *Final Vendetta*. Where that game fits in well with the Neo Geo library, early screenshots of *He-Man* show a visual style more reminiscent of mid-Nineties Capcom games. The game is due for release on PlayStation 5, Xbox Series S/X, Switch and PC in 2026. Unfortunately, the studio's other hotly anticipated licensed game, *Terminator 2D: No Fate*, has been delayed to 31 October. "Co-ordinating and manufacturing the physical release has been a longer process than we anticipated," said a statement on the Reef Entertainment website, which further explained that the delay also applies to the digital release, so the studio will use the extra time "to apply some final polish to the game itself".

## LASERACTIVE REACTIVATED

You've heard of Mega-CD, but how about Mega-LD? This uncommon Laserdisc-based Mega Drive format required a Pioneer LaserActive with a Mega Drive add-on, and until now its games were endangered software. Thankfully, the efforts of developer Nemesis over more than a decade means that they're finally supported via the Ares emulator – a big win for preservation.

## BLUE BOMBER GOES BLU

Discotek Media has announced a Blu-Ray release of the 1994 *Mega Man* animated series for 28 October, for Region A territories (the Americas, Japan and parts of Asia). The single disc contains all 27 episodes of the show in standard definition, with extras including the pitch pilot, TV commercials and a new commentary with Mega Man's voice actor, Ian James Corlett.

**Who is Iain Lee?**
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

# Simple games for simple people

**I am a very simple man with very simple tastes.** I like strong coffee in the morning, shed loads of cats and lots of naps. Back in the day that would have sounded pretty dull (apart from the cats. Cats have never been dull to me). But at the ancient age of 52, that is a pretty brilliant lifestyle I've just described.

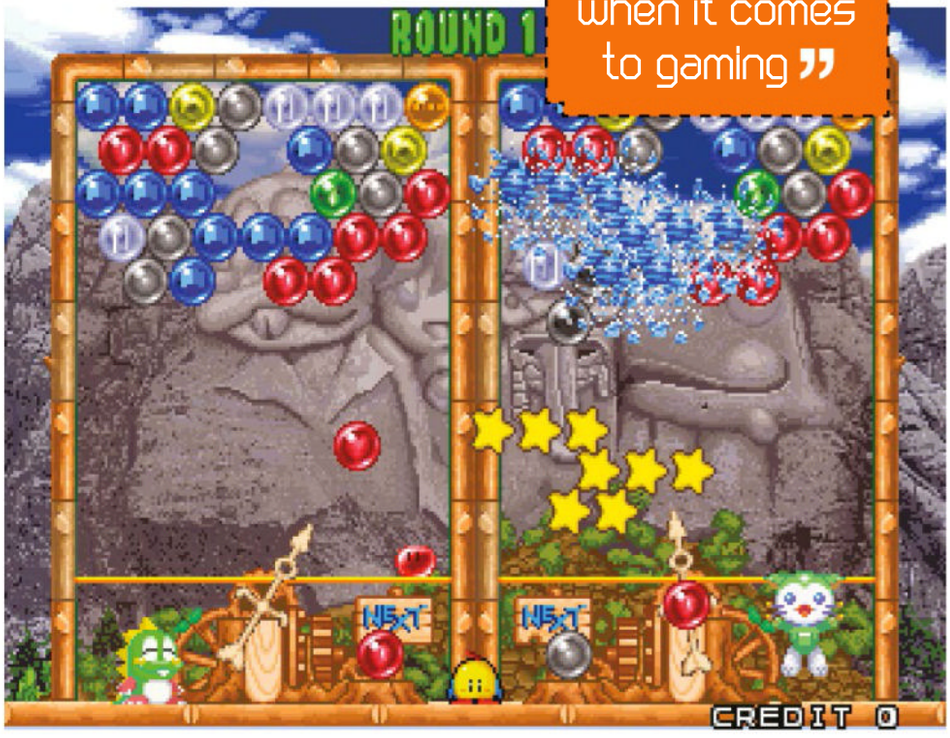
I also have basic requirements when it comes to gaming. *Kingdom Come: Deliverance II* sat in my PlayStation ready to go. But it is too complicated. Firstly, titles with punctuation in. Stop. I actually had to Google how to write it correctly. Secondly – I got into a training bit where I was sent off to get a bow and arrow then return to some dude who was going to teach me. I COULD NOT PICK UP THE ARROWS. I'd approach them from every angle, and I just could not grab them. The teacher got angrier and angrier every time I returned empty-handed. He started swearing and that was an instant uninstall for me. I have people talking to me like that in real life, I don't want it in a game. Honestly, when was it OK to have a character call you the worst swear word in the world? Mary Whitehouse would have kittens.

> "I have basic requirements when it comes to gaming"

The next game I picked up was *Puzzle Bobble*. I got one of those retro stick things from TikTok for a few quid. I must remember not to buy stuff at 2am when I can't sleep. Although this was actually a decent purchase. I went straight to the old *Puzzle Bobble* with my fiancée and suddenly an hour had passed. Aim, click. Aim, click. Beautiful. The emulator crashed (I OWN ALL OF THE ROMS SO LEAVE ME ALONE) and I stumbled on *Bust-A-Move* which is what I thought *Puzzle Bobble* was. Side note – what is the difference between the two games. Can someone point me to the **Retro Gamer** issue where they must have explained that? [There's no real differences that I'm aware of. *Bust-A-Move* is just an alternative regional name for *Puzzle Bobble* – Ed.]

*Bust-A-Move* is so beautiful. So easy. I played it with Katherine, with one of her kids and later on my own. I'm jonesing to play it now but instead I have to write about playing it to you people who I bet are desperate to have a go. Try and play it for five minutes, I dare you. Because trust me, you will lose an entire day.

I know there are new ones out there, *Vampire Survivors* being a great example, but that is the exception that proves the rule. *Pac-Man* – just a stick. *Frogger* – just a stick. Of course I'm not calling for the abolition of games with all kinds of sub-menus and multiple combat options, that would be old man shakes fist at cloud territory. No, hang on, actually I am calling for that. I'm starting a movement RIGHT NOW called AGWAKSMMCO. Who will join me and make gaming great (and simple) again? To join, send me £100,000 and never contact me again.




## Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK | retrogamermag.bsky.social | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@futurenet.com

THE BRAIN TUMOUR CHARITY

A CURE CAN'T WAIT

# EVERY 46 MINUTES SOMEONE IS DIAGNOSED WITH A BRAIN TUMOUR.

## Work with us to accelerate a cure

Brain tumours affect more than 11,000 people every year and survival rates are among the lowest of all cancers. We need your support to help us get closer to defeating brain tumours.

Text DEFEAT5 to 70507 to donate £5, please help us to fi nd a cure.

**thebraintumourcharity.org**

© The Brain Tumour Charity 2020. Registered Charity in England and Wales (1150054) and Scotland (SC045081)

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

**Who is Paul Rose?**
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

# Shooting sacred cows

**I'll tell you what you don't get anymore: truly bad games.** I'm mostly talking about major releases here, not indie experiments. Obviously, not every game today is a hit – plenty launch riddled with glitches, unfinished features, or broken promises. Lest we forget, the whole *Cyberpunk 2077* debacle.

And yet… I actually played *Cyberpunk* at launch, and honestly? It was fine. Nowhere near as catastrophic as the internet outrage would have you believe. A long, long way from the unmitigated disaster of *ET* on the Atari VCS – and at least you could see the ambition behind it.

Maybe it's an age thing, but it feels like most of today's so-called 'bad' games are still better than many of the 'good' games I grew up with. Back then, plenty weren't broken because of ambition, crunch, or rushed deadlines – they were flawed from conception, or shackled by the limitations of the hardware they were built for.

I might be in the minority here, but with a few exceptions, I found most Atari VCS games borderline unplayable. Not just by today's standards – even back then, I'd sit there wondering what I was missing. [Is that pitchforks on the horizon? – Ed]

Take *Adventure*, for example. It's considered a classic – even featured as a major plot point in *Ready Player One* – but playing it feels like an interactive migraine. Or *Night Driver*? Come on. Even in the Eighties, most school calculators had better graphics.

And let's shoot another sacred cow while we're taking aim: *Knight Lore*. In fact, any of Ultimate Play The Game's 'Filmation' releases. Did anybody actually suffer through the slowdown and fiddly controls to finish one of those? Or did we all just use them as bragging rights to claim the Speccy had better graphics than the Commodore 64?

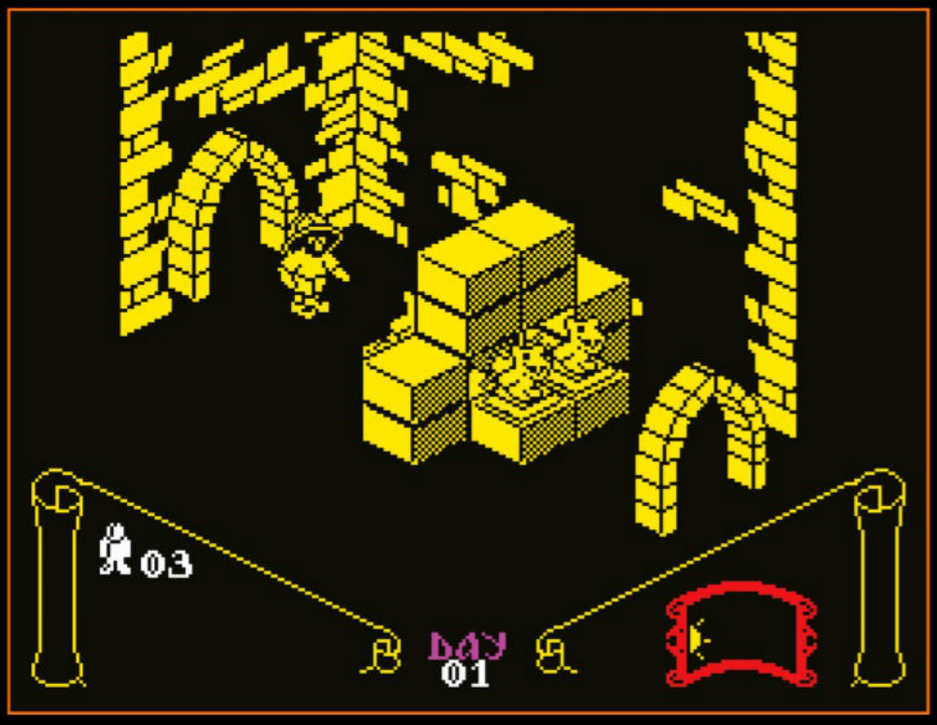
Why stop there? *Manic Miner* demands inhuman precision – an insufferable trial-and-error ordeal. I still remember picking up the top-reviewed *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* for my Atari ST… only to give up almost immediately because the puzzles were so obscure that the only way to finish the game was to browse magazines for the solutions. These weren't games for the average player. They were designed for single-minded masochists.

Things did get better, though. By the 16-bit console era, we seemed to hit a sweet spot – a perfect fusion of creativity and hardware. But then the industry became obsessed with polygons… and, well, it all went sideways again. Only this time in 3D.

So let's fast-forward a few years, and keep the heresy coming: *GoldenEye 007*. Yes, it was revolutionary at the time, but I revisited it recently and, man… those floaty controls aged like milk. And while we're at it, have you tried going back to the original *Resident Evil*? God, it's slow and clunky. Tense and atmospheric, sure – but mostly because the tank controls make it so hard to move that death, or accidentally walking into the furniture, is always one panicked misstep away.

Look, I love all those games, I still get a nostalgic buzz from all of them, but I lived through the Eighties, Nineties and Noughties, and facts is facts: we're living in an era now where the supposed worst games of today are still more playable than most of the best games of the past. Fight me.

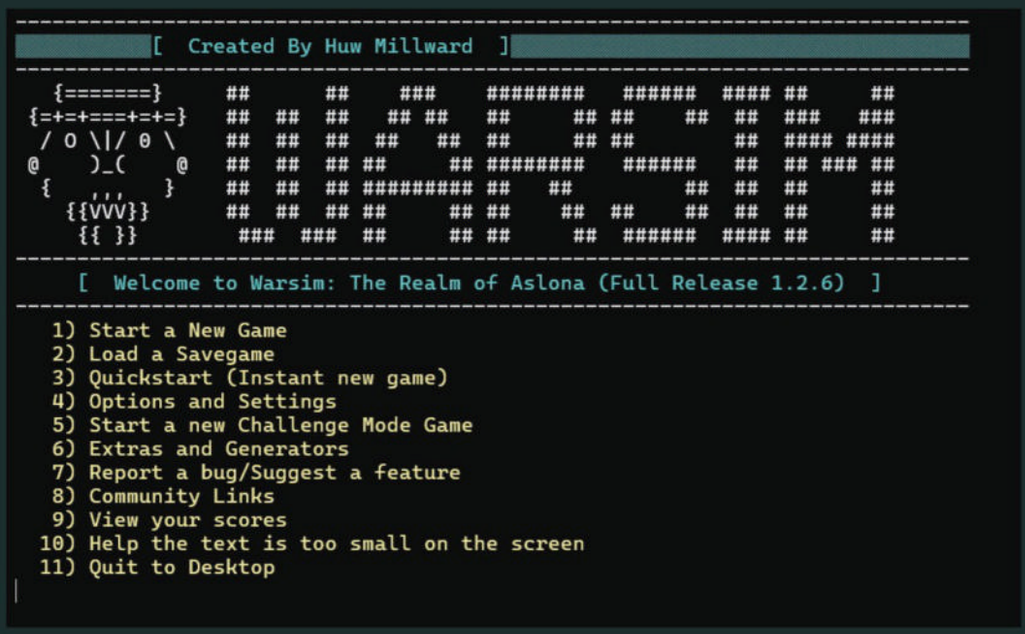
> "These weren't games for the average player. They were designed for single-minded masochists"




**Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:**

RetroGamerUK | retrogamermag.bsky.social | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@futurenet.com

# WANT TO KNOW HOW A GAME THAT LOOKS LIKE THIS HAS SOLD OVER 100K COPIES ON STEAM?


[ Created By Huw Millward ]
[ Welcome to Warsim: The Realm of Aslona (Full Release 1.2.6) ]
1) Start a New Game
2) Load a Savegame
3) Quickstart (Instant new game)
4) Options and Settings
5) Start a new Challenge Mode Game
6) Extras and Generators
7) Report a bug/Suggest a feature
8) Community Links
9) View your scores
10) Help the text is too small on the screen
11) Quit to Desktop

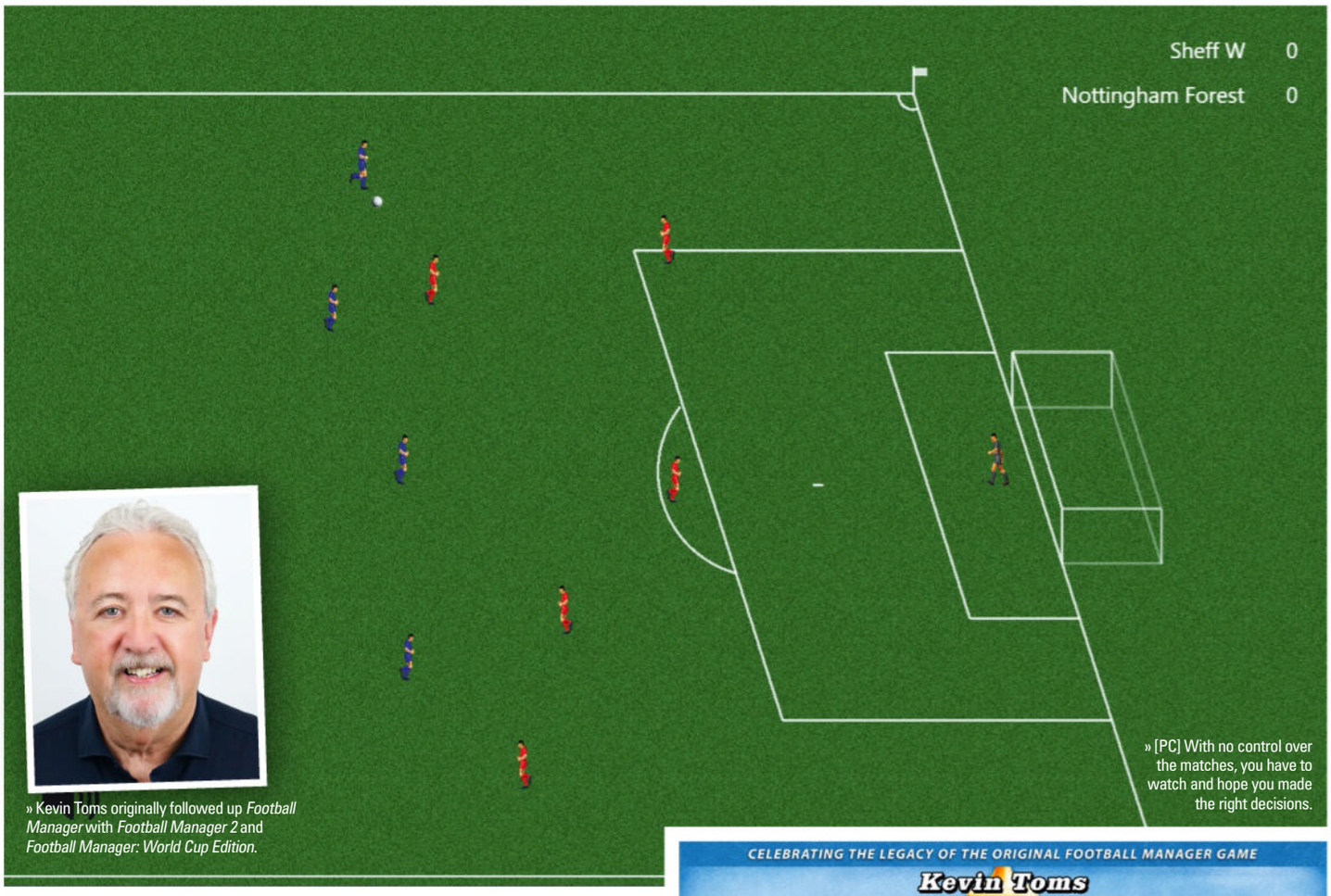
- Over 150 free updates, adding more than 10,000 new features.
- Rated Overwhelmingly Positive by players.
- Thousands of throne room events, each one unique.
- Over 94 million procedurally generated fantasy races to discover.
- Trillions of random faces possible, thanks to 40+ face generator tools.
- An evolving arena that can be owned, ruled, and used to host tournaments of all kinds.
- Mountains of mini-games and hidden features waiting to be explored.
- And so much more – even I can't remember it all (it's been a long 9 years, folks!)

I reply to nearly every comment across our community, so don't be a stranger!

**Warsim: The Realm of Aslona, 9 years in solo development!**
**Available on Steam, Itch.io and GOG**

Scan this with your phone, or search Warsim in google!

Also out now our physical Collector's Edition on Warsimstore.com




» [PC] With no control over the matches, you have to watch and hope you made the right decisions.



» Kevin Toms originally followed up *Football Manager* with *Football Manager 2* and *Football Manager: World Cup Edition*.

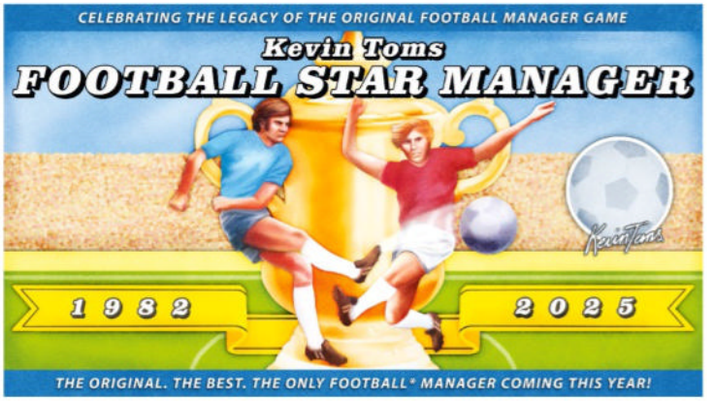
# Kevin Toms

## From the Speccy to Steam, the original Football Manager kicks off again

**Kevin Toms dusted down his original 1982 *Football Manager* game and released it on iOS and Android in 2016.** Now he's back with another faithful remake called *Kevin Toms Football Star Manager*, this time on Steam. Here Kevin tells us about the game which launched the football management genre and reflects on why it remains so well supported.

**What originally inspired you to develop *Football Manager* in the early Eighties, Kevin?**
It was originally conceived as a board game but when I became a professional computer programmer I realised I could put the two things together. The first home computer that caught my eye was the TRS-80 – I couldn't afford one so I bought a clone called the Video Genie. I thought I could make a football manager game on it.

**The game became particularly well known on the ZX80 and ZX81. When did you decide to port it?**
It was a couple of months before I decided to launch the game on the TRS-80. The ZX81 had come out so I converted the game for the ZX81 with the 16K RAM. It was a good decision. In January 1982, I placed a quarter-page ad in *Computer & Videogames* magazine because everything was by mail order at that time. Within three or four months, I'd sold 300 games – 297 on the ZX81 and three on the TRS-80. Had I not created the ZX81 version, I'd have looked at the TRS-80 sales and probably said it wasn't going to work.


CELEBRATING THE LEGACY OF THE ORIGINAL FOOTBALL MANAGER GAME
Kevin Toms
FOOTBALL STAR MANAGER
1982
2025
THE ORIGINAL. THE BEST. THE ONLY FOOTBALL* MANAGER COMING THIS YEAR!

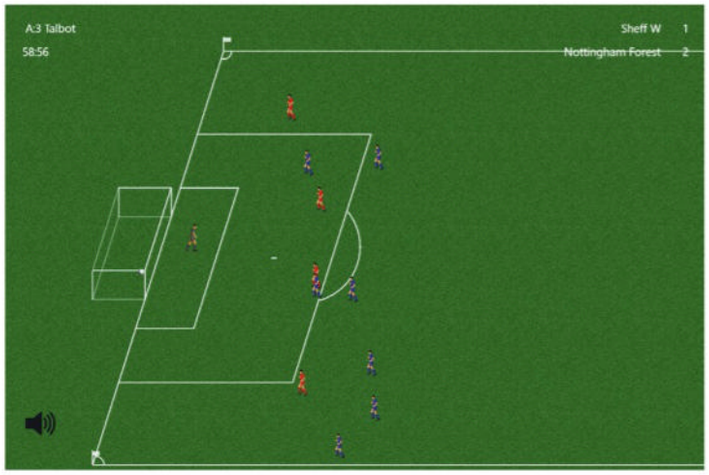
» *Kevin Toms Football Star Manager* is now available on Steam for £4.99.

**Was *Football Manager* a difficult game to program?**
Programming was limited by the lack of memory, which restricted what I could do. I had to be quite creative to get the game into 16K of memory so I had to cut the size of the team and player names and simplify some of the algorithms. I was also thinking about the tactical balance and strategic balance in the game.

**There were advanced features. The game allowed players to dabble in the transfer market too, didn't it?**
I was interested in implementing some of the fun parts of being a football manager, that's the way I saw it. So the players had attributes

» [PC] No UEFA Champions League here: it's just the plain old European Cup.

» [PC] Games can also unfold via text, reflective of the game released in 1982




– Skill, Position and Fitness Level – which could be affected by playing. They could get injured too. The game matched a real manager's problems: he can't play his best squad all the time and has to rest players. The transfer market allowed a team to be strategically built over time, weighing up the financial aspects because you didn't have endless money.

**_Football Manager_ evolved during the Eighties but, given the popularity of Sports Interactive's _Football Manager_, why have you decided to bring your game back to life for modern machines?**

I've always dabbled with games and programming mobile apps. I put a message online saying I could rewrite my original games for mobile and I got a very positive response. That was the trigger. I put *Football Manager* out on mobile, did that over about 18 months and really enjoyed the process. I've now recreated it for Steam and it adapts well to desktop.

**How have you balanced modern expectations with the original's classic simplicity?**

It's obviously retro. It looks retro but the gameplay is the key. Is it fun? Does it keep you interested? A guy once said he played Sports Interactive's *Football Manager* – 200 hours over seven seasons. I said to him, when you play my game, you play 200 hours and 200 seasons. That's the difference. And I get people who play lots and lots of seasons – 500 or more. For that to happen, the game has to have something that keeps their interest going. So while my game is apparently simple and easy to pick up and play, it's a challenge. The game holds interest in a number of ways.

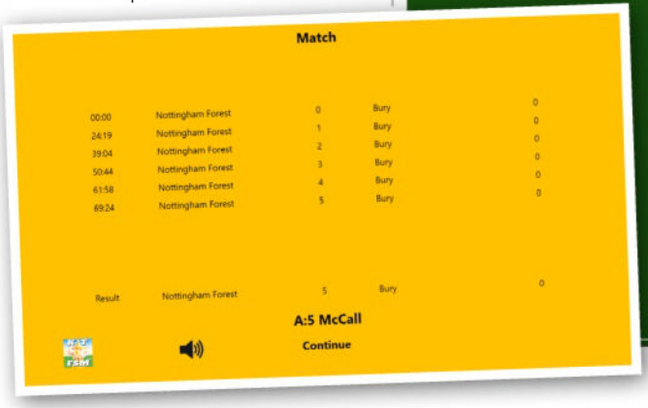
**Is the relaunched game innovative or primarily for the nostalgia market?**

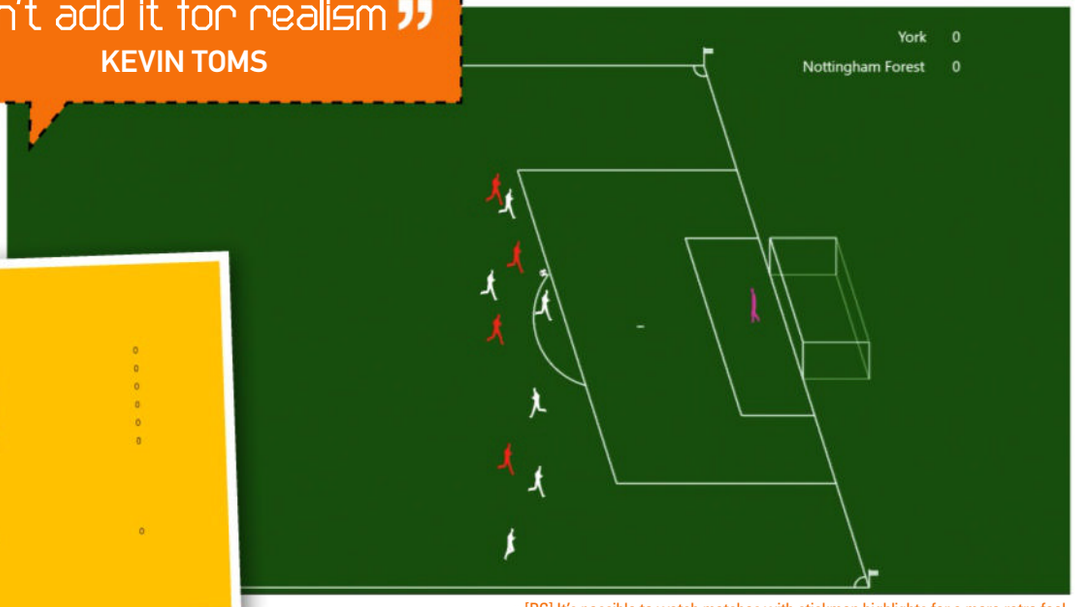
Both. I had more scope with what I could do with the technology so I could improve the design, the way morale works, the way that the players evolve, the fact that they have an age and retire. The match action is much more intricate but I've kept the essential flavour of the game as much as possible. And it has its own place at the moment because modern games have become sophisticated and complex. In my game, if something doesn't add to the gameplay, I won't add it for realism. There is still no clock showing how much time is left in a match. It maintains attention because you don't know whether there's enough time for the other team to score one goal or four goals.

**What are your future plans?**

I'm going to carry on incrementally improving the game. I added leaderboards for Steam to bring in some competition against other players. There's a Rich List too. People contact me and say they've got three billion in the bank and I see it as a good sign. If they're still playing when they're absolutely loaded with money, then the challenge isn't destroyed by money. I feel that's a good thing. ✱

> "If something doesn't add to the gameplay, I won't add it for realism"
> **KEVIN TOMS**


Match
00:00 Nottingham Forest 0 Bury 0
24:19 Nottingham Forest 1 Bury 0
39:04 Nottingham Forest 2 Bury 0
50:44 Nottingham Forest 3 Bury 0
61:58 Nottingham Forest 4 Bury 0
69:24 Nottingham Forest 5 Bury 0
Result Nottingham Forest 5 Bury 0
A:5 McCall
Continue




» [PC] It's possible to watch matches with stickmen highlights for a more retro feel.

LEGACY OF KAIN
SOUL REAVER
1 & 2 REMASTERED™

# Return to Nosgoth

**After lying dormant since 2003, the vampire Raziel has arisen thanks to brand-new remasters from Aspyr.** As part of *Soul Reaver*'s 25th anniversary, *Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver* and its sequel are now receiving a physical release, including a stunning *Collector's Edition* that's bound to excite fans of the beloved series.

## The Originals

Set 1,500 years after the events of *Blood Omen: Legacy Of Kain*, *Soul Reaver* begins with betrayal as Raziel, a loyal servant of Kain, is killed by the despotic vampire. Raziel is soon resurrected by The Elder God who makes him his Soul Reaver and the newly raised Raziel vows his revenge. Highly capable in combat and with the ability to transfer between the Material and Spectral Realms, Raziel picks up a wide range of abilities in his pursuit of Kain.

Originally created by Crystal Dynamics, the game itself is an impressive, sprawling adventure and whilst not strictly a 3D Metroidvania, it certainly shares similarities, particularly in how gaining new abilities lets Raziel re-explore previously visited locations. The success of *Soul Reaver* led to a 2001 sequel that not only continued Raziel's story but greatly enhanced the narrative scope and focus of the overall *Legacy Of Kain* series. Once again directed by Amy Hennig, Crystal Dynamics' sequel leaned heavily into the lore of the series and expanded its time-travel concepts. Like its direct predecessor, *Soul Reaver 2* is a third-person adventure that once again lets Raziel travel between Realms as he attempts to complete his epic quest. It features greatly improved combat over its predecessor and features new abilities to expand on Raziel's already-considerable powers. Raziel still needs to consume souls to sustain himself, but can also pick up numerous elemental powers for use in the Material Realm. It remains a worthy sequel to Raziel's first epic adventure with a truly elaborate story.

## The Remasters

Texas-based Aspyr Media has built a strong reputation for porting numerous games, particularly to Apple's Mac, and by 2003 it was responsible for 60% of all games ported to the system. It continues to port and remaster games today and *The Legacy Of Kain* games are some of its most recent examples, along with a number of *Star Wars* games and the first six *Tomb Raider* titles. The remasters of *Soul Reaver 1* and *2* add several improvements over the original games, modernising them for a new audience with numerous quality-of-life features and previously unseen materials from the original releases. The most notable difference is that you can instantly toggle between the remasters and the originals, so you can easily see the many improvements Aspyr has made. Other highlights include a new map and compass which makes navigating Nosgoth far easier and even a Photo Mode, so you can capture Raziel's greatest encounters and discoveries. Achievements have also been included.

Raziel himself moves with more precision than he did in the original games (although the original control systems can still be used) and there are new extras like an Interactive Lore Map that charts the history of the series and exclusive concept art that will give fans better insight behind the two games. There's even the opportunity to explore the Lost Levels that never made it into the original games. If you're a longtime fan of the games or new to the series, you'll find Aspyr's remasters more than worthy of your time. ✱

» [PlayStation 5] Kain (left) is no longer the main playable character, as the focus switches to Raziel (right) for *Soul Reaver 1* and *2*.

» [PlayStation 5] Here's a side-by-side shot highlighting how Raziel has been overhauled for the new remaster.

» [PlayStation 5] Nosgoth is a huge area to explore, meaning you'll really get to test all of Raziel's abilities.

### Exclusive Steelbook

The *Collector's Edition* contains an exclusive steelbook with iconic artwork from the series and is designed to keep your game safe whilst looking stylish on your shelves.

### The Games

*The Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver 1* and *2* are now available in physical form for the Switch and PlayStation 5, making this an essential pick-up for collectors.

### Art Book

*The Art Of Nosgoth* is a book full of stunning art that gives you a fascinating glimpse into the world of Raziel and Kain.

### Official CD Soundtracks

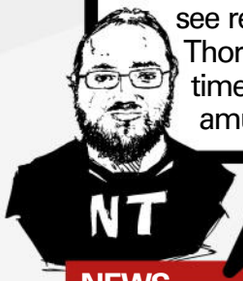
*The Legacy Of Kain* series is well known for its atmospheric scores, so it makes sense for the new *Collector's Edition* to feature two superb CD soundtracks.

### Enhanced Extras

Aspyr's new remasters feature improved audio and visuals and numerous quality-of-life extras, specifically designed to make exploring Nosgoth a pleasure.

## Buy it now from the Amazon store

# BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES



**APRIL 2009** – Capcom wants you to share the horror with a friend, Creative Assembly wants you to adopt an imperial mindset, and PlatinumGames wants you to see red. Once again, Nick Thorpe is back on the time-travel trail for your amusement

» [Xbox 360] Chris Redfield and Sheva Alomar team up in this one, and that's as much as Nick wants to know.

## NEWS APRIL 2009

**Scottish singer Susan Boyle became an overnight sensation after appearing on the 11 April episode of *Britain's Got Talent*.** The live audience was stunned by her performance of *I Dreamed A Dream* from *Lés Miserables*, and a YouTube video of it gained 15 million views in under a week. She made it through to the series semi-final and the final, but lost out to the dance troupe Diversity.

The H1N1 swine flu virus officially spread to the UK on 27 April, with two confirmed cases in Scotland. Confirmed cases of human-to-human transmission were recorded in the country just days later, and by 2 July, the UK had experienced 28,456 lab-confirmed infections, leading to 474 deaths. The pandemic wouldn't begin to subside until November 2009, and was declared over in August 2010.

On 30 April, just over six years after Iraq was invaded by a US-led coalition, the UK officially ceased military operations in the country. The war, predicated on ultimately disproven claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, resulted in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003 and the deaths of over 110,000 Iraqis by April 2009. 179 UK soldiers were killed.

# THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 2009

***Resident Evil 5* took the fight against bioweapons to Africa, and it was easily the biggest console game going in April.** Capcom's latest entry in the series was warmly received, earning 9/10 from *games™*, 86% from Play, 8/10 in *Official Xbox 360 Magazine* and 7/10 in *Edge*, adding to last month's scores of 5/5 from *360*, 8/10 in *Official PlayStation Magazine* and 8/10 in *X360*. Directing praise at the co-op gameplay, *games™* described it as "Capcom's most ambitious entry into the series yet" and "an intense and relentless action experience". *Edge* felt that adding a second player elevated the game from "merely good to great" but wasn't happy that there was "so much reverential reuse of ideas" from *Resident Evil 4*.

The top game of the month was reserved for PC owners, though. *Empire: Total War* had earned 94% in an exclusive review in *PC Gamer* last month, and this month it received 10/10 from *Total PC Gaming* and 9/10 each from *games™* and *Edge*.

» [PC] People in similarly coloured clothes clash violently, professionally rather than as football hooligans.

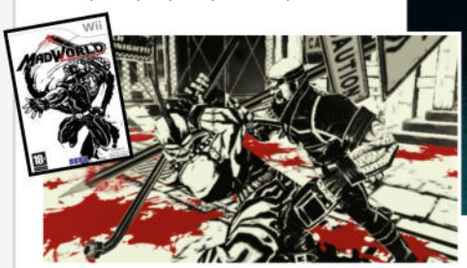
*Total PC Gaming* declared it to be "the greatest, most accomplished and ambitious strategy epic in the history of gaming and one of the most exceptional games of all time" and "practically three games in one" due to its use of turn-based campaign map segments, real-time 3D land battles and the addition of real-time 3D naval combat. *Edge* also felt the game to be "slick, intelligent, accessible and layered enough" to earn new fans.

The Wii may have been better known for casual party games than blood-soaked action fare, but Sega and PlatinumGames attempted to change that with *MadWorld*, a black-and-white brawler with noticeable streaks of the red stuff. The game earned 85% from *Official Nintendo Magazine*, 84% from *NGamer* and 8/10 from *games™*. While it felt that the camera was "certainly not ideal" *NGamer* enjoyed the "spiky, filthy, milk-out-of-the-nose funny" commentators and felt that the game was "visually astounding and raucously nasty". The official magazine detected "a vague whiff

of style over substance" but still felt that, "Adult Wii owners looking for stylish arcade action and gory guffaws need look no further."

*The Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena* incorporated both an updated version of the original *Escape From Butcher Bay* first-person adventure, plus a whole new campaign. *OPM* and *OXM* had the exclusive last month and each gave it 8/10, and the other magazines concurred, with *Total PC Gaming* and *X360* both going for 8/10 and *360* giving it 4/5. "It's a package that represents quantity and quality," said *X360*. "The original is vital for anyone interested in the genre, and considering the Xbox 360 market, that should be a fair few of you. And if you prepare yourself to feel a little underwhelmed, there's still an involving shooter to plod through afterwards in *Dark Athena*."

Handheld fans had an interesting option in *Henry Hatsworth In The Puzzling Adventure* – a DS game that scored 86% in *NGamer*, 8/10 in *Edge* and 74% in *ONM*. The top screen is a standard platform adventure, while the bottom touch-screen is a regular puzzle game. "Alone, neither of the elements would impress much – they're well presented but basic," said

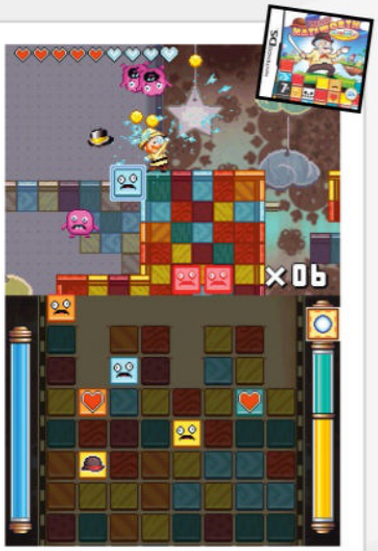


» [Wii] *MadWorld* is stylish as heck, and it's very cheap to pick up these days too.

» [PC] We dare not estimate how much this screenshot cost in booster packs.

*NGamer*. "Together, though, they create a game that lures you in with its simplicity and then kicks you in the plums – and yet you love it." *ONM* liked it at the budget price of £14.99 but lamented its restraint, saying "If only EA had pushed the bizarreness boat out a little further."

Lastly, PC owners looking for some real-time strategy that was a little different from the *Total War* hybrid model could purchase *Battleforge*, a fantasy-themed game which included a trading card element. The game scored 9/10 in *Total PC Gaming* and 81% in *PC Gamer*. The latter magazine expressed some unease about the game's financial model, which required players to buy additional booster packs for more in-game cards, but noted that rare cards "aren't silver bullets" and still praised the game. "Fascinating



» [DS] A peril of working on **Retro Gamer** is being reminded of cool games to buy, like *Henry Hatsworth*. [I already have it – Ed]

deck building, compelling carnage, spiffing co-op… as long as you approach *Battleforge* knowing that it will take all your money and leave you sleeping under cardboard in an underpass given half a chance, it's hard to envisage disappointment."

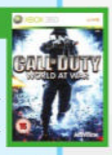
Join us again next month, when we'll be sleeping under an underpass after having spent all our money on virtual cards.

» [Xbox 360] Without guns, Riddick has to sneak into close range before initiating combat.

## CHARTS

### APRIL 2009

**XBOX 360**



1 – **Call Of Duty: World At War** (Activision)
2 – **Skate 2** (EA)
3 – **FIFA 09** (EA)
4 – **Left 4 Dead** (Valve)
5 – **Fable II** (Microsoft)

**PLAYSTATION 3**

1 – **FEAR 2: Project Origin** (Warner Bros)
2 – **Call Of Duty: World At War** (Activision)
3 – **LittleBigPlanet** (Sony)
4 – **FIFA 09** (EA)
5 – **Resistance 2** (Sony)

**PC**

1 – **Football Manager 2009** (Sega)
2 – **FEAR 2: Project Origin** (Warner Bros)
3 – **World Of Warcraft: Wrath Of The Lich King** (Activision)
4 – **Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3** (EA)
5 – **Grand Theft Auto IV** (Rockstar)

**MUSIC**

1 – **I'm Not Alone** (Calvin Harris)
2 – **Poker Face** (Lady Gaga)
3 – **Jai Ho (You Are My Destiny)** (AR Rahman feat. Pussycat Dolls)
4 – **In For The Kill** (La Roux)
5 – **Don't Upset The Rhythm (Go Baby Go)** (Noisettes)

## THIS MONTH IN…

### Official PlayStation Magazine

"By Sony's own admission 2008 was a slow year for the PSP, but the comeback starts here," says the magazine. The proof? New games including *MotorStorm: Arctic Edge*, *LittleBigPlanet*, and an exclusive *Assassin's Creed*.

### X360

*Street Fighter IV* is great online, but, "The constant stream of cheap Ken players you'll come up against is so frustrating they threaten to destroy the fun entirely. Do they know there's more than one move?"

### NGamer

Capcom is bringing *Monster Hunter 3* to Europe. "They're hoping to make the series as popular in the West as it is in Japan, which might be easy now that there's a Wii in *every* home." Well, maybe not *that* easy…

## 25 YEARS OF EPIC BATTLES

# TOTAL WAR

THE FIRST TOTAL WAR GAME WAS THE BREAKOUT HIT THAT CREATIVE ASSEMBLY NEEDED TO FREE ITSELF FROM ITS WORK-FOR-HIRE SITUATIONSHIP WITH ELECTRONIC ARTS. SINCE THEN THE SERIES HAS GONE FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH, COVERING EVERYTHING FROM THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND THE NAPOLEONIC WARS TO SKAVEN AND UNDEAD LORDS

**KEVIN MCDOWELL**

■ Having been an artist on the *Total War* series since *Rome*, Kevin has since gone on to lead the franchise as art director at the studio.


**When all is said and done, *Total War* hasn't really changed in the 25 years it's been around.** But that's not a criticism, not in the slightest. No, it's a testament to the inescapable love of watching hundreds of little men hitting each other with swords, of setting up ambushes or initiating a perfectly timed cavalry charge. It's a recognition of the perfect blend of macro and micro, of broader empire management and precise real-time battle tactics. Few gaming franchises can survive so long with their foundational gameplay at the core without a radical makeover, brand reboot or a concerted effort to diversify.

Yet to pay tribute to one of gaming's most iconic RTS games is to also acknowledge the impressive efforts of its creator, who has been at the helm since the very first game in the series, *Shogun: Total War*, released in 2000. Since then it's been adaptable, touching on broader eras of war from the Roman empire and the Age Of Discovery to more focussed periods as seen in *Napoleon* or *Attila*. It's even reached into fantasy having turned the *Total War* series to the *Warhammer* brand, too.

*Total War* is a formula that has proven to work time and again but as the franchise has evolved, its developer Creative Assembly has grown alongside it. ✱

**IAN ROXBURGH**

■ *Total War* was Ian's passion even before joining Creative Assembly to handle their PR and marketing for *Medieval*. Over time he switched to design and is now game director.

# SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR

**PC • 2000**

The boom of the real-time strategy genre, and specifically *Command & Conquer*, was the very early starting point for what would go on to be *Total War: Shogun*. But with the advent of 3D graphics cards on PCs, Creative Assembly stumbled across a new perspective for the genre. It brought the camera down closer to the ground and, looking out onto the horizon, it was not unlike the same perspective a commander might have had over a battlefield. This changed the scope of the game completely, shifting *Shogun* from what was planned to be a 'risk-free' project intending to capitalise on the popularity of the RTS genre to something much grander in scale.

Further inspirations behind the game came not from videogames, but from Kurosawa movies, the *Shogun* TV series and even Sun Tzu's *Art Of War*. That last one even inspired a gameplay element where birds could be seen flying out of a forest at locations where the enemy were waiting in ambush. The *Shogun* board game was also present in the office, which likely fed into the higher level strategic half of the game which was always intended from the start. With the two pieces of the game feeding into each other symbiotically, *Total War* as we know it was born and history was made.

## KEVIN'S MEMORIES

"When I came for my interview at CA, they took me upstairs and showed me a build of *Shogun* running. I guess the novelty of *Shogun* was that with the camera you could see into the horizon, and you're controlling these groups of men, like a proper little war game. In my sketchbook at the time, which I had with me at my interview, I had like a sketch of a game that I would really love to work on, which was pretty much the same kind of game design as *Shogun*, except it was Vikings and Ragnarok. I also have always been a very big fan of Japanese culture and Japanese art and everything. I was like, "My God, I gotta work at this place. This is amazing." So it was kind of awesome to work at this company that was making this cool game even though I wasn't planning on working on it, I was working on sports games."

## WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

THE KEY ELEMENTS THAT MAKE UP A TOTAL WAR GAME

### COMMAND...

Core to the gameplay is the high-level strategic planning and execution of the large-scale battles, where unit type, positioning and strength all factor into your success.

### ...AND CONQUER

The campaign map is where the player must expand and grow their empire in search of resources for stronger armies, advance their technology, or to just defeat opposing powers.

### PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE

While diplomacy was weaker in the earlier games, it was still important to build alliances, trade resources and generally work to make sure you weren't fighting battles on several fronts.

### TAKING AGENCY

On top of diplomacy there is the Agent system, which could indeed be diplomats or assassins and spies. In later games princesses could be married off, bishops spread religion, champions boosted morale and so on.

## IAN'S MEMORIES

"When I joined the company it was still gonna be called *Crusader: Total War*. And then 9/11 happened. I think George W Bush gave that speech going "this crusade, this war against terror", so we couldn't really call it that."

# MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

**PC • 2002**

With *Shogun* having already proven there was a formula here with *Total War*, the next step was to scale up. Creative Assembly could step out of its work-for-hire situation and focus its efforts solely into *Total War*. The sequel used an upgraded engine of the one used in *Shogun*, bringing with it larger unit counts, an improved campaign map and siege combat mechanics among countless other improvements.

The fact that it touched on a much broader and larger expanse of land across a number of cultures and nations enabled a richer and more engaging political element to the campaign map that *Shogun* could only lightly touch on.

# ROME: TOTAL WAR

**PC • 2004**

Development on *Rome* actually began at the same time as *Medieval*, but since the focus here was to transition everything over to the 3D space a new engine was needed. This meant swapping out sprites for full 3D models of units, or switching the *Risk*-style province-based strategy map to something more strategic with free movement across a 3D map. This engine would end up being used by the BBC in a TV series about contestants battling out historic battles, known as *Time Commanders*.

## IAN'S MEMORIES

"The initial plan from Lion TV [for *Time Commanders*] was that they wanted the contestants to be geared up with electric shock suits. And if one of their units got killed, they were gonna literally shock them. And I think that would have been a much better show."

## WIN AT WAR

THE TRICKS YOU NEED TO SURVIVE AS A COMMANDER

### HAMMER & ANVIL

Lock enemy units in place with spearmen, hoplites and the like, then come at them from the flanks with cavalry or shock troops to deal significant damage. Just be wary of the enemy doing the same.

### USE THE TERRAIN

High ground is important for your archers, giving them longer range and damage. Swamps will slow approaching enemies, while bridges funnel them towards you. Forests are best suited for ambushes.

### SAP THEIR MORALE

If you can overwhelm an enemy to such a point that its units begin to rout, they're temporarily out of the battle and therefore give you time to focus elsewhere. Bringing down generals first is the key.

### CHASE 'EM DOWN

If a unit is routing, remember there's every chance that it will return to battle. Keep that in mind so that they don't return to attack from behind. It's best to send some cavalry to run after them and finish them off.

## ROME: TOTAL WAR: BARBARIAN INVASION

**PC • 2005**

While *Shogun* and *Medieval* both had their own *Invasion* expansion packs (*Mongol* and *Viking*, respectively), it was *Rome*'s version with *Barbarian Invasion* that evolved the concept to something worthy of recognition. Where the earlier two had their invading hordes feel more akin to random problems to attend with, the barbarians in *Rome*'s expansion pack could raze cities, settle and migrate to new areas. They felt more like a threat to attend to, rather than a reskinned set of enemies to kill.

It brought with it other elements that added depth to the experience, too, such as how religion could impact diplomacy or how each of the different barbarian factions played differently to one another. Perhaps most interesting however was the time period, with players facing new survival-like challenges as they witnessed Rome collapse on itself.

## ROME: TOTAL WAR: ALEXANDER

**PC • 2006**

While it's not as impactful as *Barbarian Invasion* or *Kingdoms*, this expansion is notable for being the first game in the series to focus on a single historical figure. Furthermore, if Alexander is killed the game will immediately end.

# MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

**PC • 2006**

■ Given the time it took to develop the new fully 3D engine for *Rome*, it made sense that *Medieval* also be brought over to benefit from the enhancements and upgrades. In part because those same unit models, environments and animations could be used in whatever came in the future more easily, but because the setting had been so popular it was a good chance to see just how much the engine could give to a broader theatre of war. Perhaps it's a testament to that, then, that *Med II* remains one of the most popular games of the series.

## IAN'S MEMORIES

"We were doing a cinematic and we didn't have any sound effects and we needed some for the battle. So a few of us went in with a microphone and we just basically screamed into a microphone. It was just so low-tech back then. We literally used to use the foam of the mouse mats and squish it and whatever for the sounds of bodies. But that low-tech nature of it meant that you had to be creative, right?"

## CONQUER THE CAMPAIGN

HOW TO PLAN FOR WAR

### ECONOMICS 101

■ Building for income early in the game will give you earlier access to more units and more city buildings and that is critical, but remember that you do need to advance army technology and keep civil unrest low.

### EARLIER EXPANSION

■ It's wise to start expanding as soon as you can, but throughout the game be picky about what you're devoting resources to. Focus on cities that have valuable resources or economic benefits, and don't overstretch your borders.

### DIPLOMATIC RESPONSE

■ Making smart effective use of your princesses, finding out your neighbour's secrets through your agents or just generally trading and making alliances will all be more effective than if you just seek to conquer all who stand in your way.

### WE'RE NOT WORTHY

■ Don't overlook unrest or religion. Early on these are not things to consider, but if you keep that attitude as the campaign rolls on you'll find yourself struggling to hold your cities just through these two factors alone.

## MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR: KINGDOMS

**PC • 2007**

■ Rather than attempt another *Invasion* expansion, *Medieval II* saw the release of what would later go on to be termed 'campaign packs'. Rather than expanding the core gameplay, *Kingdoms* instead added in four new campaigns to play through, with a host of new maps, factions, units and some unique mechanics to consider.

This covered battles in the Americas with the Spanish conquistadors versus Aztec warriors, Vikings against the British, the Crusades in the Holy Land and the Teutonic Wars with the Northern Crusades. These added a lot of variety, but more than anything else happened to establish a very enthusiastic modding scene that later went on to become the foundation for a large number of the popular modding teams, some of which are still active within the *Total War* modding community even to this day.

# EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

**PC • 2009**

Development on this one began as far back as the release of *Barbarian Invasion*, but given the large amount of content and the massive tech problem that needed to be solved (naval battles), it's not surprising a new engine was needed. The cost was high though, because while its new gameplay elements and improvements were praised, the game itself did come with a number of bugs on launch.

## IAN'S MEMORIES

"We considered the theme: was it going to be commercially viable globally? Is it of interest to enough people? *Empire* is almost like a modern version of *Rome* where you've got Europe and you've got America, so quite a wide range of interest. We thought, "Well, we wanted to add a new feature to the game, naval battles, and this is a great period to do that."

# NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR

**PC • 2010**

At this point it's probably fair to say that Creative Assembly was beginning to settle into its groove. The series itself was established and a community around it had formed, and critically the company had grown to a point that it was able to begin to speed up production of its games.

*Napoleon* was built on the *Empire* engine which helped to speed up its development, but even so a year-long turnaround between mainline releases hadn't been achievable at that point. *Napoleon* was interesting, too, for setting a template for a *Total War* games that were more focussed in scope, not broader campaigns like that of the Crusades or the Roman Empire but instead in the life of important historical figures, in this case Napoleon. It allowed players to explore the decisive moments of one of history's greatest generals, either from the side of Bonaparte himself or one of his rivals at the time.

# TOTAL WAR: SHOGUN 2

**PC • 2011**

In the spirit of maximum efficiency, *Shogun 2* was built on *Empire*'s engine. But returning to the series' origins meant a much smaller scale than *Empire*, which actually ended up being a massive boon for the game. It is considered one of the best *Total War* games precisely for its tighter focus, simplified variety of units and a purposeful art design.

## KEVIN'S MEMORIES

"Before *Shogun 2* launched, the game was in a mess. Mike Simpson called us up on a Friday and said, "This game is in a mess… I know that you're exhausted, so go home now. But come back with your family, with a blanket, and come back to the studio tomorrow morning… and we're gonna sit and have breakfast together. And after breakfast, then we can work on the game, if you guys want." That for me was the idea that they're not just, 'You work for us.' They care about you."

# FULL SAIL AHEAD

VICTORY AT SEA REQUIRES SOME PARTICULAR STRATEGIES

### WIND MASTER

Pay attention to the direction and strength of the wind, since using that will give you great mobility on the water allowing you to better position your ships into a more suitable firing position.

### KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

Knowing what you're facing also means knowing their firing range and speed. Kite slow ships around the waters while keeping them out of firing distance if you can.

### FOCUS FIRE

Unlike the traditional ground battles in *Total War*, naval battles are better suited to focussing on a single unit until it is out of the fight. It's best to focus on an admiral or a powerful ship.

### TIME TO BOARD

Boarding a ship is a finisher move, essentially, so you're better to wait until the opposing ship is immobile and your boarding crew will significantly outnumber the enemy.

## TOTAL WAR: SHOGUN 2 FALL OF THE SAMURAI

**PC • 2012**

Released as a standalone expansion pack for *Shogun 2*, *FOTS* was something of an anomaly among *Total War* expansion packs at that time since it didn't require the base game to buy and play it. And, much like the game it was built upon, it has ended up being regarded as one of the best expansions released for the series.

Arguably many of the core elements of *Shogun 2* were still here and unchanged, but what made it interesting was the era that it played in. Rather than seeking to unify Japan as with *Shogun 2*, *FOTS* focussed on the Boshin War, an era of unrest for the country as influence from Western powers caused a split between traditionalists and modernists. Not only did this have an impact on the political aspect of the game, but players needed to choose an affiliation that ultimately led to which units and technology they had access to: cannons and gunpowder, or traditional swords and archers? The tech behind it was so well received, it proved that a 19th century *Total War* game could absolutely work.

## TOTAL WAR BATTLES: SHOGUN

**IOS • 2012**

Like many franchises around this same time, *Total War* was brought over to iPad and iPhone in an attempt to capitalise on the rising popularity of Apple's devices as a gaming platform. The idea behind the *Battles* moniker must have surely been to introduce the series to smaller-scale games that could be released alongside the 'main' games on PC. The first of these used the *Shogun* setting, therefore, which was the most recent release on PC at the time.

It was obvious that the large-scale battles of the series wouldn't ever be ported over successfully to the weaker hardware, so the gameplay differed quite significantly. Hex-based grids, basic building construction and automatic squads of units made the game much simpler than the franchise had ever been before, but that wasn't especially a bad thing. It played to the platform's strengths and was well received for what it was trying to do.

## TOTAL WAR: ROME II

**PC • 2013**

Fans had been calling for a sequel to *Rome* since the original, and now that Creative Assembly had grown, had the tech but also had an understanding of what *Total War* was and could be, an updated version to the original just made sense. Here the goal was to push towards something more cinematic and to give the various factions within the Roman Empire a stronger identity. While Creative Assembly did achieve this, the rocky launch with bugs and other issues impacted what would have otherwise been a suitably grand sequel.

### IAN'S MEMORIES

"Once *Rome* was successful and Creative Assembly became a big company, Mike Simpson hired all those really smart guys who knew about coding and all that stuff. And suddenly our team got a lot bigger. It was like, "Wow, you can actually do that?" We could make the game do what we wanted it to do. We were able to add things that we really wanted to have in the game, but we couldn't [previously] because of our small size."

## THE PERFECT EXPANSION?

WHAT MADE FALL OF THE SAMURAI THE BEST TOTAL WAR EXPANSION PACK?

### DECISIONS, DECISIONS

Requiring the player to choose between traditionalism or modernism wasn't just a powerful narrative move given the era, but it had a strong impact on your approach to combat, too.

### GUNPOWDER & DYNAMITE

*FOTS* proved that *Total War* could absolutely work in a 19th century, gunpowder-fuelled setting. The demand for a Victorian *Total War* has yet to be satiated.

### WESTERN INFLUENCE

Having the likes of the British and the French meddle with the politics of the campaign map was a chaotic factor to consider, and historically relevant.

### STANDALONE

Given the overall package available here, *Fall Of The Samurai* absolutely could stand on its own. In fact, some players actually preferred it to the base game, *Shogun 2*.

# TOTAL WAR: ATTILA

**PC • 2015**

In the past, *Attila* might well have been little more than an expansion pack akin to *Barbarian Invasion*. But after the success of *Napoleon*, it was clear there was scope to reuse the updated engine that *Rome II* was using for something more targeted in its scale. The 'horde' mechanism had proven popular in the past, too, so a game built entirely around the idea gave *Attila* a lot more legs (or is that hooves?) that it might have otherwise had.

Here there are many more factors to contend with than just purely defending against the onslaught of the Huns. Instead, factions may be made up of migrating citizens, while changing religions impacts politics. The fertility of a region can even be impacted by a historically accurate mini Ice Age, which again, affects the decisions you make on the campaign map. All of this is presented through a darker, almost apocalyptic tone that added to the feeling of a constant threat from Attila.

# TOTAL WAR BATTLES: KINGDOM

**MOBILE, PC • 2015**

Just three years after the previous *Battles* game, the mobile-gaming market had shifted significantly. Hardware was improved and players had a much broader range of the sorts of games they could play. *Kingdom* is a good representation of this: the fidelity had improved significantly over *Battles: Shogun*, and a richer campaign map element was introduced. The combat style maintained the smaller scale, but even that had deeper options when it came to strategic input.

Bringing some added depth to the *Total War* spin-off was a good thing and likely the reason it was also brought over to PC (with cross-platform functionality, no less), but this middle ground between the two platforms meant it didn't really catch on for either audience and is likely why an announced *Warhammer* equivalent some years later never came to fruition.

# TOTAL WAR: ATTILA: AGE OF CHARLEMAGNE

**PC • 2015**

If the base game of *Attila* had been more like a survival game experience, *AOC* adopted something closer to the traditional *Total War* empire management with its early mediaeval setting. While it was still smaller in scope (it was an expansion pack after all), its tighter focus and more controlled campaign experience removed a lot of the complexities of *Attila* in favour of managing a kingdom through loyalty and religious tensions.

Many *Total War* players were drawn to it for its setting. The different factions and their unique playstyles, the specific goals that they had to achieve and the fact that the expansion was as much about the kingdom meant *AOC* is still thought of as a sufficient stopgap until *Medieval III* is released – which has remained a question for community members since *Medieval II* released all those years ago.

# MOD SCENE

THE BEST MODS EVER MADE FROM TOTAL WAR GAMES

## THE THIRD AGE

Widely considered to be the best *Total War* conversion mod of any game, *The Third Age* uses *Medieval II* to recreate the intricate warring world of Tolkien's *The Lord Of The Rings*, replete with One Ring powers.

## EUROPA BARBARORUM

If *Total War* has never felt quite historically accurate enough, then this mod spanning the ancient world (4th-1st BCE) is for you. It overhauls everything about the base game for an authentically historical game.

## THE GREAT WAR

Creative Assembly might never handle the First World War as a setting due to the challenges it faces in making that enjoyable for every kind of player. This mod is there for that niche audience that would adore it.

## MEDIEVAL KINGDOMS 1212 AD

This mod turned the systems built for *Attila* into something closer to what fans would want to see from *Medieval III*. It's a sprawling High Middle Ages sandbox there until CA does the job itself.

# TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER

**PC • 2016**

If ever there was a pairing of IPs that made sense, *Medieval* combining with the beloved wargame *Warhammer* was one of them. Games Workshop is inherently built around large-scale battles, so extrapolating that into *Medieval*'s game engine to see thousands of 'minis' duking it out was exciting.

It was the first time that Creative Assembly had properly dabbled with fantasy for a core game, and that brought with it a huge number of changes, tweaks and issues that needed to be addressed. Ultimately it gave CA the chance to have a bit of fun with their engine, and unsurprisingly it was well received.

## KEVIN'S MEMORIES

"For a couple of years we'd been wanting to do a fantasy game for a while, and we couldn't decide on which one. We'd had a lot of discussion about what kind of fantasy, and we tried to work with a lot of different licences, a lot of different people. And the only one that worked out in the end was Games Workshop. We were really lucky with that, it took a lot of risk out of the equation."

## TOTAL WAR: ARENA

**PC • 2018**

As a free-to-play multiplayer-only version of the *Total War* series, it's easy to point fingers and call *Arena* a cynical attempt at doing something unnecessarily different for the franchise – but that's never been Creative Assembly's way. While not entirely accurate, perhaps the best comparison is the MOBA genre, since *Arena* was about teams of players playing as specific commanders with unique options available to them to overwhelm and overcome player opponents on the other side.

Many facets of the real-time strategy battles were carried over to *Arena* in terms of unit movement, strategic positioning and all that good stuff, but it was still enough of a reworking to something faster paced and action orientated that it was a hard sell not least because of the free-to-play nature of it. It lasted a year in closed beta before ultimately being closed down.

# TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER II

**PC • 2017**

With only a year difference between the original, *Warhammer II* perhaps caught *Total War* fans off guard having not seen such a direct sequel released by the studio back to back before. In any case, the foundation for the game was already built, and with the sequel Creative Assembly was able to push more strongly on more interesting elements and more diverse variety, with asymmetrical faction playstyles, a narrative-driven campaign map and some more exotic races than the 'standard' fare seen the year prior.

## IAN'S MEMORIES

"*Warhammer I* was such a big change in terms of flying creatures and all that kind of stuff. It was using the core engine from *Rome II* but we had to add new stuff and evolve it. But then as soon as you do *Warhammer II*, you're taking an existing art style, an existing engine, and going, "Right. Now we're fine-tuning that. We're adding new features, we're doing new stuff, but you're building on a solid base." It allows you to have a more polished experience."

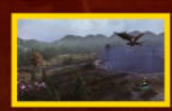
## MAGIC AND MONSTERS

WHAT TOTAL WAR COULD DO WITHOUT HISTORICAL LIMITATIONS

### ACTIVE ABILITIES

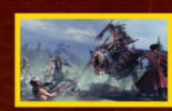
Now players had lords and special units capable of magic and active skills that they could use to change the course of battle.

### FLYING UNITS



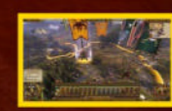
Dragons, gyrocopters and harpies added a mobility to the battlefield that needed a whole new level of strategy to consider.

### SINGLE-ENTITY UNITS



Exceptionally powerful units represented threats that felt like mini-bosses that needed to be focussed on, which added an epic feeling to their defeat.

### ASYMMETRICAL FACTIONS



Factions played in incredibly different ways, not only with the units they had access to but also on the campaign layer.

# TOTAL WAR: THREE KINGDOMS

**MOBILE, WINDOWS • 2019**

There was more to *Three Kingdoms* than just the Chinese setting, adored for its hugely improved diplomacy, the narrative-infused characters and the gorgeous art style. It was one of the highest rated *Total Wars* and beat *Warhammer II*'s active Steam players during launch. This reputation did suffer a dent when fans were disappointed with CA cancelling DLC and long-term support, but a lot of its innovations carried through to later *TW* games.

## IAN'S MEMORIES

"The community is always great. The way that they get so behind the game, that they get so involved, that they get so passionate. You feel like they're helping you to make a better game. I love the modding community and that keeps games alive for so many years after the game's been released because they want to play a version of the game that we're not able to make. The excitement and the passion that they have for the games makes me remember my excitement and passion for what I am doing."

# A TOTAL WAR SAGA: THRONES OF BRITANNIA

**PC • 2018**

*Total War* had often dabbled with the Viking Age and certainly the Vikings had been a regularly occurring faction within the series, but it wasn't until *Thrones Of Britannia* that they came into focus as they were one of the key factions vying for control of the British Isles.

Naturally the scale of the campaign map was significantly smaller as a result, but that was a driving design decision behind the whole game. In fact, its full title was *A Total War Saga: Thrones Of Britannia*, that added *Saga* alluding that this was a much more zoned-in and directed game than previous *Total War* games had been. This had some successes and its streamlined and bloat-free experience did prove that smaller scope projects could work effectively. But that simplicity did come with some drawbacks, not least because of player expectations that were frankly not met in this release.

# A TOTAL WAR SAGA: TROY

**PC • 2020**

Having learnt some lessons from *Thrones Of Britannia*, the latest *A Total War Saga* title focussed on "the truth behind the myth" of the Trojan War in a way that was more obviously not a 'typical' *Total War* experience. Here historical elements of the Bronze Age (the first *Total War* game to do so) were blended with fantastical elements of Homer's epics.

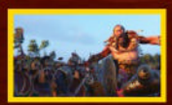
As with the previous *Saga*, it was a smaller and more focussed game that allowed experimentation in ways that could be taboo in mainline *Total War* games. Hero units were capable of special abilities, for example, that significantly impacted a battle, while divine intervention from the likes of Zeus or Aphrodite provided buffs to the player. It straddled the line between realism and fantasy to offer something really quite different.

There's not been another *Saga* game since *Troy*, and in truth they don't garner the same appeal as mainline *Total War* games. But if they are to continue, it could be where Creative Assembly is able to try something different to learn from for the 'proper' *Total War* games.

# SECRET WAR

THE RUMOURED TOTAL WAR SETTINGS WE'VE YET TO SEE

### AGE OF MYTHOLOGY



Job listings at Creative Assembly suggested something mythical was in the works at the studio. We got *Troy* and *Mythos*, but perhaps this ended up as the *Warhammer* games.

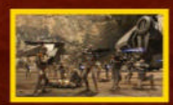
### WARHAMMER 40K

Internal testing suggested that CA experimented with cover systems and gun combat with *40K* in mind. We feel it would be a good switch-up after the *Warhammer* fantasy trilogy.

### SHOGUN 3

Datamining suggested that files pointed towards the fact that *Shogun 3* was considered for development not long after the success of the second game.

### STAR WARS



Rumours and fan-demand have been flying around what is an easy-to-imagine combination of IPs for a long time, but licensing this one would be a major obstacle.

## TOTAL WAR: ROME REMASTERED

**PC • 2021**

Since the franchise typically comes at its most beloved titles with sequels rather than a bit of spit and polish, *Rome: Remastered* is an anomaly. But it's a great choice to remaster, bringing the classic series into the modern era with better graphics, smoother playability and a host of quality-of-life improvements.

## A TOTAL WAR SAGA: TROY: MYTHOS

**PC • 2021**

Whether it was intended from the start of Troy's development or not, Mythos was an answer to those complaints of the base game that it didn't really know what it wanted to be. It was true that there were certainly mythical elements to *Troy*, players had hoped that it was either full-on fantastical or rather representing the Trojan War as a po-faced faction management game.

In any case, *Mythos* made sure that wasn't an issue any more. By adding the Mythic Expeditions mode, players could capture or recruit powerful mythological creatures such as Griffins, Cerberus, Cyclopes or Hydras. In a lot of ways it turned Troy into the *Age Of Mythology: Total War* experience that many players had been hoping for in the first place. *Total War* has long been a game of constant iteration, experimentation and – for Creative Assembly especially – a long list of lessons and learnings that the studio can bring forward for future games. Maybe as a result of *Mythos* we really will one day see a main game more strongly tied to mythological battles.

## TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER III

**PC • 2022**

The *Warhammer* branch of *Total War* games was always planned to be a multi-game span, and while it's been talked of as a trilogy there's undoubtedly space for Creative Assembly to forge ahead with this one given its popularity. The third game was a culmination of the work done on the earlier games, refining the systems as well as adopting other learnings from non-*Warhammer* iterations too. Not only that but the release of Immortal Empires, a free update for those with all three *TW:W* games, combined every faction, lord and settlement into one gigantic sandbox map for the ultimate fantasy of *Warhammer* conquest.

### IAN'S MEMORIES

"[With the *Warhammer* sequels] we're adding new features, we're doing new stuff, but we're building on a solid base. And it's building the base as well that takes a lot of time. The thing is that the base game is a lot of new content and a lot of new things to play. Then the second game, then the third game and then we tie them all together in the final thing. It's all about making the games [graduallly] more polished and more robust."

## TOTAL WAR: PHAROAH

**PC • 2023**

The studio had flirted with a more ancient era in *Troy*, but with *Pharaoh* it strongly leveraged it for pure historical conflict. Here though it was less about conquering the known world, and instead explored the fall of civilisation. Dynamic crises like volcanic eruptions, invasions, and civil wars escalated unpredictably and instead emphasised one's legacy rather than mere.

It was always going to be harder to handle a less technologically rich era like the Late Bronze Age and its narrower scope did draw comparisons to the *Saga* titles, but *Pharaoh*'s experimental approach did show that there could be alternatives to the typical empire-building that were equally as compelling and narrative-driven.

While *Pharaoh* is the last in this list, it won't be the last *Total War* game. It is so ingrained within the genre, and its dedicated fans are very much invested. And much like **Retro Gamer** itself, there's still plenty of history to cover.

### KEVIN'S MEMORIES

"We want to make a strategy game that is super amazing and that people care about, and that's exactly what we get to do. So it's not about making a game, it's about making a good game. That's the best part for me."

NINTENDO SWITCH 2

# DONKEY KONG BANANZA

## OUT NOW

ONLY FOR NINTENDO SWITCH 2

Nintendo Switch 2 Camera sold separately

7 www.pegi.info

## SMASH, BASH AND GO BANANAS WITH DONKEY KONG!

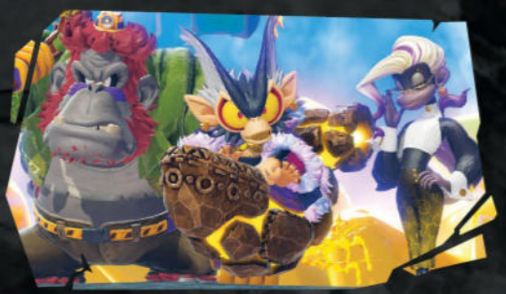
JOIN THE UNLIKELY DUO OF DONKEY KONG AND PAULINE...

...AS THEY SMASH THEIR WAY THROUGH A VAST UNDERGROUND WORLD.

© Nintendo

UNLEASH THE BANANZAS AND TRANSFORM INTO NEW ANIMAL FORMS!

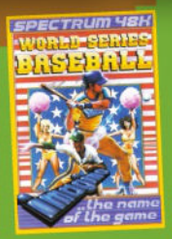
DELVE DEEPER UNDERGROUND TO DISCOVER A SUBTERRANEAN WORLD THAT'S MORE THAN IT SEEMS ON THE SURFACE...



...AND RECOVER THE STOLEN BANANAS FROM THE MYSTERIOUS VOID COMPANY.

Nintendo eShop | My Nintendo Store Nintendo

# THE MAKING OF WORLD SERIES BASEBALL




**AIMED AT AN AUDIENCE OF GAMERS MORE USED TO FOOTBALL, CRICKET AND RUGBY, WORLD SERIES BASEBALL NEVERTHELESS STEPPED UP TO THE PLATE AND HIT A HOME RUN WITH A FUN ARCADE GAME THAT INITIALLY FRUSTRATED BUT HAD PLAYERS STRIKING OUT FOR MORE**

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

## IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** IMAGINE SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** IMAGINE SOFTWARE/ PLATINUM PRODUCTIONS
- **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64, COMMODORE PLUS/4, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
- **RELEASED:** 1985
- **GENRE:** BASEBALL

**When Imagine Software went bust under a mountain of debt in 1984 – its troubles infamously captured on camera courtesy of a BBC documentary – it left the future of some games hanging in the balance.** One of those was *World Series Baseball*, a half-finished sports simulation that had shown great promise. Rather than strike it off and consign it to history, however, the game was handed a lifeline.

Imagine, founded by Mark Butler and David Lawson, had sought to explore the appeal of American sports. *World Series Baseball* had been in production along with *World Series Basketball* and Ocean Software, which swooped in and bought Imagine, decided they were worth rescuing. David Collier was tasked with completing the Commodore 64 version of *World Series Baseball* and the creation of a Spectrum version was commissioned to a third-party developer called Platinum Productions.

"*World Series Baseball* was a good product and that was one of the games made available by the liquidators – there wasn't another like it around – the graphics were very good," Colin Stokes, Ocean's operating manager, told *Crash* magazine at the time. Since Ocean wanted to retain the Imagine name, it decided *World Series Baseball* would be the first release under the rejuvenated brand. The idea was to release it around the summer of 1985.

The game was designed with a long and impressive list of features. It was envisaged that gamers would be able to view the entire ballpark, thereby allowing them to see all nine outfield players (who catch or field balls), the hitter (the one who whacks the ball) and any baserunners (those looking to advance from base to base and score a run). This inevitably caused a slight issue: the visuals would need to be small, making it more difficult for a gamer to see when a ball is pitched in order to bat it.

To resolve the problems associated with the forced perspective, the action was

### DAVID ANDERSON

■ David now lives in Bilbao where he leads the Mauvius Group best known for a management method called Kanban.

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**JUMPING JACK**

**PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM, ATARI 8-BIT, DRAGON 32

**RELEASED:** 1983

**ARCADIA**

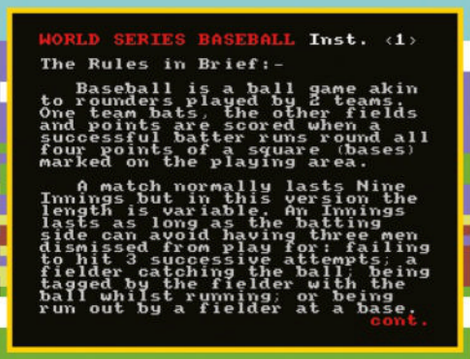
**PLATFORM:** VIC-20, ZX SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64, DRAGON 32

**RELEASED:** 1983

**WORLD SERIES BASKETBALL (PICTURED)**

**PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM

**RELEASED:** 1985


WORLD SERIES BASEBALL Inst. (1)
The Rules in Brief:-
Baseball is a ball game akin to rounders played by 2 teams. One team bats, the other fields and points are scored when a successful batter runs round all four points of a square (bases) marked on the playing area.
A match normally lasts Nine Innings but in this version the length is variable. An Innings lasts as long as the batting side can avoid having three men dismissed from play for: failing to hit 3 successive attempts; a fielder catching the ball; being tagged by the fielder with the ball whilst running; or being run out by a fielder at a base.
cont.

» [ZX Spectrum] David Anderson admits he only really understood baseball after moving to the US in 1999.

» [C64] Any action shown on the screen would also be replicated in real-time in the stadium.

» [C64] The stadium screen would also display key information about the events of each game.

displayed on a stadium screen so that players could see the pitcher and hitter side-on. They could then either get the ball in play or bat depending on the team's turn. It laid down the basics for the game, allowing the developers to work on implementing the sport's rules while adding some neat little flourishes that would add to the game's overall polish.

"The game was intended to be easy and fun to play," explains David Anderson, cofounder of Platinum Productions based in Ayrshire, Scotland. Just 18 years old at the time, David had set up the development company with his school friend, Ian Morrison, having learned machine code on a ZX81. They were joined by Robin Muir who knew the pair from school. He too had a ZX81 and enjoyed producing music. All three worked on *World Series Baseball*. "It needed to be easy for a UK and European audience to understand and [play]," David adds. "Authenticity was not the goal."

**The in-house team and Platinum Productions didn't collaborate on the game.** "We didn't have a lot of interaction with the in-house design team," David explains. "This was probably a mistake on the part of the leadership or maybe they saw it as an advantage." In that sense, the Spectrum version, while largely driven by the design decisions for the Commodore 64 lead platform, wasn't a 100% faithful reproduction. "Some of the design decisions were made by the creators of the Commodore 64 game – their interpretation of America – and we copied them to make the Spectrum version as similar as possible to the C64 version but some of the humour came directly from us," David says. This, of course, included the use of the stadium screen. "The C64 version had this and it was a cool idea," David adds. "I don't remember much about coding it though. I recall it wasn't a challenging game, technically."

> "WE DIDN'T HAVE A LOT OF INTERACTION WITH THE IN-HOUSE DESIGN TEAM"
> DAVID ANDERSON

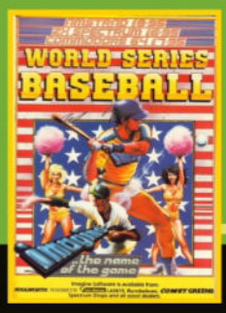
The game was, however, challenging to play. It would take gamers a fair few attempts to get to grips with the nuances of *World Series Baseball* primarily because there was a lot to remember in terms of where the joystick should be pointing at various points during play.

For example, when pitching, a player would need to push up for a high ball and down for a low ball. But it was also possible to move the joystick left or right for a fast or slow ball and go diagonal for fast or slow high or low balls. Fielders were also controlled by the joystick and it was a matter of grabbing the ball then pushing up, down, left or right to aim it at the relevant base (or trying to catch the ball).

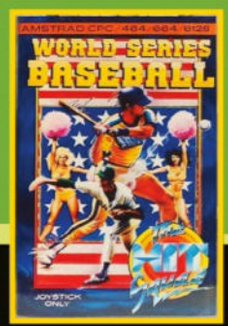
Their positioning would be determined whenever 'Outfield' was displayed on the stadium screen – they could be in or out. When batting, there were other controls to consider including whether to run forward or back depending on whether a fielder ▶

» [Amstrad CPC] The idea was to make the game feel as American as possible so cheerleaders were added for some razmataz.

» [ZX Spectrum] It was possible to make tweaks to the game – changing the difficulty against the computer would help.




» *World Series Baseball* was a full-price release – with different prices for each of the systems!



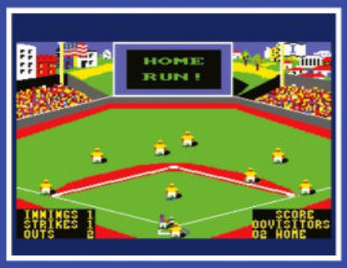

» *World Series Baseball* was also rereleased on Ocean Software's Hit Squad budget label.

# CONVERSION CAPERS

TAKE YOUR BEST SWING ON THESE PLATFORMS

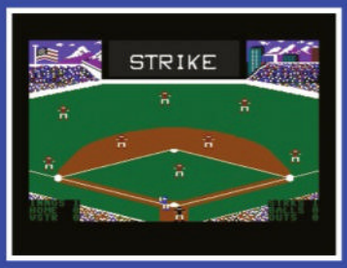
## ZX SPECTRUM

■ Despite depicting players as simple-looking stickmen, *World Series Baseball* on the ZX Spectrum was still a well-presented game requiring great skill. Players needed to focus their attention on the stadium display where the action unfolded a little too slowly but there was great attention to detail.



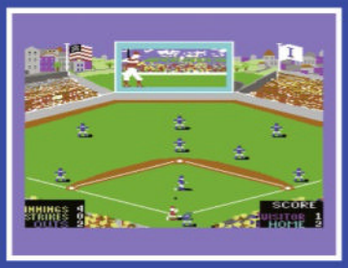

## AMSTRAD CPC

■ The CPC version was a far more colourful affair which, combined with crowd noise, better positioning of each game's stats and a lack of distracting adverts, made for a more polished title overall. That said, it played in a similar fashion and retained a lovely rendition of the US national anthem.




## COMMODORE 16/PLUS 4

■ Although not quite as bold and chunky, this version also had colourful graphics and the same in-depth gameplay as the versions on other platforms. Even so, the action on the screen was less clear, the names of some of the stats were abbreviated and the game was certainly lacking in terms of audio.



## C64

■ A far better Commodore version was to be had on the C64 and that's not only because it had great in-game music. The presentation just felt more polished, as perhaps you'd expect on a more advanced machine, with the action on both the stadium screen and on the pitch also proving fast and fluid.

**"IF YOU LET 18-YEAR-OLD KIDS CREATE YOUR PRODUCT, YOU'RE GOING TO GET SOME SHARP WIT"**
DAVID ANDERSON

▶ was likely to reach the base first.

It was also possible to steal a base where you were a pitcher or a runner – it required skill and judgement on the part of the gamer. Of course, all the while, gamers were looking to get three strikes to put an opponent player out of the game or trying to get as many runs as possible to win a game over nine innings.

It was possible to play against a human opponent or against the computer – there were many claims the computer cheated and it did feel that way at times. "I remember we'd been researching things like rules-based engines – something we'd found in books from the University Of Strathclyde bookshops," David says. "So it was decision-tree based. There wasn't the computing power for any sort of machine learning, neural-network type functionality."

» [ZX Spectrum] For a little bit of authenticity, the Spectrum version of the game included some adverts – albeit for British companies.

**To that end, the game logic was relatively simplistic.** Development was also made simpler due to advancing technology. "Tools had improved over time," David recalls. "In the beginning we wrote machine code typed as hexadecimal into REM statements in BASIC that served as both an operating system and a programming language. By 1983, assembler tools were available that enabled us to write text instructions and 'assemble' them to machine code. The machine frequently crashed and it was vital to write code without bugs.

"By 1985, we had more sophisticated equipment. I honestly don't recall the make of the computer we developed on but it had floppy disks, more RAM and a cross assembler. This revolutionised productivity. We'd write on one machine, keep the source on floppy disks and test on a Spectrum or Amstrad CPC." Indeed, as the Spectrum version was underway, Ocean looked to create a version for the Amstrad CPC too.

In general, David created the graphics and sound for the Spectrum and Amstrad versions while contributing code with Ian. "Which of us programmed which parts… sorry, too long ago," David says. "Ian and I had a way of working. On new stuff, hard stuff and experimental stuff, we worked together as a pair. When it got routine,

» [Amstrad CPC] The ball has been hit and now it's a case of trying to get to the next base before the fielders catch you out.

» [ZX Spectrum] Platinum Productions which produced *World Series Baseball* on the Speccy and Amstrad, was a "go-to" team for conversions.

we worked alone because it was more productive and we trusted each other and our code quality.

"There were things that each of us liked more," David continues. "I built the engine for the front of our games – the player setup, key choices and so on and I copy/pasted and edited it for each game. Meanwhile Ian would be off building core functionality to get us moving."

To create the graphics, David used an off-the-shelf package. "For masked sprites I drew the frames of the animation and the masks were offset to the right," he explains. "We also coded our own sprite grabber tool that allowed us to swipe over the sprite and grab it. It converted it into the data format we needed in the game and we saved off the binary file then merged it into the game binary later.'

**As for the sound, Ian says he wrote the code for the synthesiser but asked Robin to provide the score.** He told *Crash* magazine, "I got a tape of the music from the Commodore version and played around with the tunes on a synth, working out the notes. Then I worked out the duration and pitch of the notes and handed data to David and Ian which they incorporated into their program." Music for the game included *The Star Spangled Banner* (the US' national anthem), *Blaze Away*, *The Stars And Stripes Forever* and *The Washington Post* none of which were more than 25 seconds in length.

Other little flourishes included cheerleaders even though they weren't a thing in baseball at that time, as well as, in the Spectrum version, adverts for shops, banks and soft drinks. There were even messages scrolling on the stadium screen, one of which said, "*World Series Baseball* is not available from hairdressers, pharmacists or branches of Dorothy Perkins." Ocean wasn't happy.

"I wrote the copy for these. Humorous stuff. Dry," says David. "The women's fashion brand got upset that their name was used – a corporate business didn't like to be made fun of. The owners of Ocean changed our contract for the future so that we had to reveal any 'Easter eggs' and jokes in the code for corporate approval. But if you let 18-year-old kids create your product, you're going to get some sharp wit embedded in there. Fun times!"

*World Series Baseball* was also produced and released for the Commodore 16/Plus 4. Each version was sold at full price in packaging illustrated by Bob Wakelin and, as well as rereleases on the Hit Squad label and appearances on compilations, the game was bundled with the Amstrad CPC. It also reviewed well, becoming a Zzap!64 Sizzler and a Crash Smash!, and the game ended up leaving a big impression on David. "It's amazing to look back and think about what we achieved."

» [C64] It was possible to steal a run by pitching a ball to the next base or running to the next base.

# SWINGING FOR GLORY

## IMAGINE'S GAME DID ACTUALLY MAKE IT ACROSS THE POND

Although *World Series Baseball* was not initially conceived for a US audience, the game did end up being released in North America. As well as being released across the pond for the Commodore 64 and 128, it was converted for the PC Booter by Randall Don Masteller. In each case, it went by the name *The Slugger* – a reference to the player who consistently hits for power and achieves doubles and home runs.

Released in 1986, it was published by Mastertronic rather than Imagine Software or Ocean Software – Mastertronic often introduced games to the US market and it had a solid distribution network in place. The name change was likely due to licensing issues. As David Anderson, developer of the Spectrum version said, "Major League Baseball threatened to sue Ocean for trademark infringement but they didn't have the name protected in the UK and Europe."

But what of the PC version? Well, it had a choice of three, six or nine innings and different skill levels. It also looked much the same as the other versions, adopting the full view of the ballpark and having both the key action and information about the game played out on a stadium screen. The game's UK origins were not forgotten, though. Bob Wakelin's artwork was used for the cover and the shirt clearly carried the Imagine Software logo on it like a sponsor.

TIME 2'29'30
SCORE 0117020
1

# Power Drift

## A TRULY IMPOSSIBLE PORT





» COMMODORE 64 » 1990 » CHRIS BUTLER

**When I was working at Gateway I got friendly with a guy called Luke and I'd often visit his house after work to play on his Commodore 64.** He'd been telling me that *Power Drift* on the C64 was "amazing" and "easily the best racer I've ever played", which left me rather skeptical. After all, I had a Master System at this point and the C64 felt a little old hat. Plus, *Power Drift* was an astonishing-looking game featuring state-of-the-art visuals and ambitious roller-coaster-styled tracks that were as over the top as the racers you could play as. I couldn't see the 8-bit machine capturing that.

Granted, *Stunt Car Racer* on the C64 had similar elements to *Power Drift* and was equally ambitious, but it wasn't in the same league when it came to speed and I knew how bad the C64 port of *Chase HQ* was, so I wasn't expecting much when we finally got to Luke's house. I even joked that it was going to be just as good as *Chase HQ*.

The joke was on me as *Power Drift* was amazing. Yes, it lacked the visual impact of the arcade original and yes the track design was a lot different, but the essence of Sega's game was fully captured and it was great to play as well. I'm still not sure to this day what magic Chris Butler pulled off to get *Power Drift* running, but the elevated tracks and handling are all present and correct and it still retains a great sensation of speed.

We had an amazing time that evening playing Luke's new game and I was always rather miffed that *Power Drift* never made it to Sega's Master System (or even the Mega Drive for that matter) as I was confident it would have been an even better version of the game.

So thanks Luke for hassling your parents back in the day for a C64 and thanks also to RLLMUK's Unofficial Who, because if I hadn't read their interesting post about impossible ports I'd have never remembered Chris Butler's stunning technical achievement. ✱

# THE RETRO GAMER GUIDE TO

# elite

# SYSTEMS

## WITH OVER FOUR DECADES IN THE INDUSTRY ELITE HAS MADE AN IMPRESSIVE NUMBER OF GAMES. HERE'S THE HITS AND MISSES THAT SHAPED THE CLASSIC PUBLISHER

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES

**It seemed like everyone wanted to get into videogames during the early Eighties, and Richard Wilcox was no different.** After publishing *Blue Thunder* under the less-than-snappy moniker of Richard Wilcox Software he rebranded the company, teamed up with his brother Steve (who handled sales and marketing) and gave his company a far cooler name – Elite Systems.

While it initially focussed on original titles like *Kokotoni Wilf* and *Roller Coaster*, the brothers soon realised the power of arcade, movie and TV licences and changed their strategy accordingly.

The end result was that Elite did extremely well throughout the Eighties and Nineties, only coming undone slightly – as many companies from the time did – with the introduction of 3D gaming and the shift from home computers to consoles. In fact it still exists today, largely operating in the mobile market – although it did work on a bluetooth version of the ZX Spectrum – which is a rather impressive achievement when you consider how fickle the games industry currently is. Here we're focusing on the titles that defined the company in its earlier days. How many of the following did you get to play?

## KOKOTONI WILF 1984

Elite's debut game may share an obvious similarity to Matthew Smith's *Jet Set Willy*, but there's still much about it that makes it stand apart from its illustrious peer. The biggest difference is Wilf's ability to fly, which greatly changes how you approach each screen. There are still plenty of tight platforms to navigate and squeeze past, but it gives you an even greater sense of freedom than Smith's game as you're not simply limited to where you can walk.

*Kokotoni Wilf*'s story (what there is) is arguably stronger too, with Wilf having to collect the scattered pieces of an amulet so he can gain access to the six time zones that make up the game's levels. Said stages are the final treat to Elite's game as they ensure that there are plenty of different areas to navigate compared to Miner Willy's (admittedly huge) mansion.

## AIRWOLF 1984

There's a lot to like about Elite's adaptation of the popular TV show. The concept is sound, with Stringfellow Hawke (classically Eighties name) navigating his eponymous attack chopper through a deep underground base in search of five missing scientists. The chopper is challenging, but not impossible, to master and the level design is solid, requiring you to shoot out switches so you can travel deeper into the complex. It's a pity then that the infamous regenerating walls that you need to shoot down to progress are just as frustrating to take out now as they were in 1984.

## COMMANDO 1985

Elite soon realised the value of converting arcade games, and it made a particularly solid impression with its conversion of Capcom's *Commando*. Virtually all its home conversions of the classic run-and-gun were well received, with the Spectrum offering being a particular highlight (and coded by Nigel Alderton, the creator of *Chuckie Egg*). Interestingly, Elite's later release *Duet* was also known by the name *Commando 85* and *Commando 86*, depending on which version you owned.

## FRANK BRUNO'S BOXING 1985

This entertaining fighting game is a shameless clone of Nintendo's 1984 arcade game, *Super Punch Out!!*, going so far as to feature three identical-looking fighters. *Frank Bruno's Boxing* was released around the same time as *Rocco* by Gremlin Graphics, but while Gremlin's game has superior visuals, Elite's offering packs a punch where it counts – in the fighting mechanics department. It's highly satisfying to systematically take down each opponent, while the difficulty factor is challenging but never overwhelming.

## 1942 1986

After the success of *Commando*, Elite worked on another Capcom arcade release, this time based on the company's popular vertical shmup. It's another fine effort which isn't anywhere near as fast as the arcade original, but does feature all the key elements, including the victory roll to escape danger, the waves of planes that drop power-ups and the landing ships. The Amstrad and Spectrum versions are particularly good as they keep the scoring on the right side of the screen to preserve the original game's aspect ratio.

## ROLLER COASTER 1986

This excellent platformer was another great original effort from Elite and proved the publisher had a good eye for interesting games. Set in a gigantic theme park, the idea is to collect the large number of moneybags that are scattered around the deviously designed screens, using the numerous rides and many roller-coasters as you go. It would be repurposed by Elite many years later for the Game Boy, as you'll discover further on.

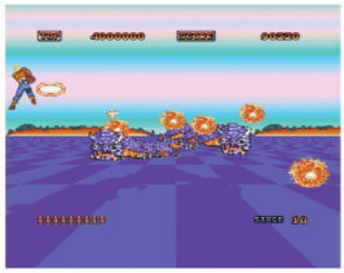
## PAPERBOY 1986

1986 was a fantastic year for Elite with a string of solid arcade conversions. One of its most popular was for *Paperboy*, Atari's excellent delivery-'em-up that was often featured on the TV show *First Class*. The Elite conversion is very good, particularly on the Amstrad where the chunky bright visuals effortlessly match the cheerful look of the arcade original. Sadly, out of the numerous 8-bit micro versions that Elite produced, only the C64 offering features in-game music.

1986 WAS A FANTASTIC YEAR FOR ELITE WITH A STRING OF SOLID ARCADE CONVERSIONS

## GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS 1986

Capcom's ghoulish platformer proved to be a good choice for Elite, with its developers doing a good job of capturing the difficulty and atmosphere of the arcade original. The Amstrad version is probably the weakest (although it has a lovely loading screen from Ste Pickford) while the C64 version (with more loading art from Ste) is easily the best and has a stunningly funky soundtrack by Mark Cooksey.

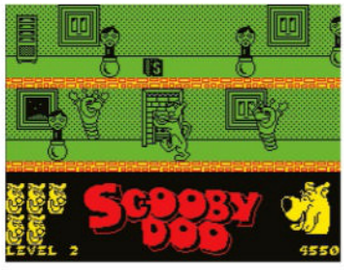


## SPACE HARRIER 1986

Elite's coders were never going to match the sheer speed and intense action of Yu Suzuki's original arcade blaster, but they certainly tried. While the 16-bit offerings are actually surprisingly faithful ports, the 8-bit offerings are less impressive, featuring dull visuals that fail to capture the excitement of Sega's arcade hit.

## BOMB JACK 1986

Ask any Spectrum owner what Elite's best arcade conversion was and they'll most likely say this one. It's a truly fantastic adaptation of Tehkan's coin-op, which requires you to fly around the screen and ideally defuse bombs in a specific order. The Amstrad version is also decent, but the ST and Amiga ones are very disappointing, particularly as they came out a good five years after the arcade original.



## SCOOBY-DOO 1986

When Elite first revealed *Scooby-Doo* in magazines it promised to be an epic-looking game with stunning *Dragon's Lair*-styled visuals. The game was simply too ambitious, however, and the humble Spectrum didn't have the memory required to store the huge number of animations that would be needed to power such a graphics-hungry game.

After the project fell apart Elite contracted Gargoyle Games, who delivered a fun, but rather conventional platformer that saw Scooby running around a haunted castle in search of his missing friends. It still looks great, with lovely visuals and expressive animation, but we'll always wonder about what could have been.

WHEN ELITE FIRST REVEALED SCOOBY-DOO IN MAGAZINES IT PROMISED TO BE AN EPIC-LOOKING GAME WITH STUNNING VISUALS

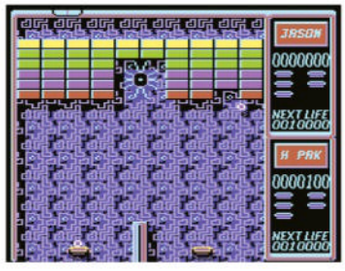
## BATTLESHIPS 1987

A computer port of the classic board game sounds dreadfully boring, but Elite did a surprisingly decent job at making it far from dull to play. The main excitement comes from watching a great sequence of your ship firing off shots and exploding others whenever you score a direct hit.

## THUNDERCATS 1987

Critically acclaimed upon release, *ThunderCats* proves to be a surprisingly average run-and-gun in the vein of *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and other similar arcade games. Lion-O must fend off attacks from an endless supply of enemies, many of which don't actually appear in the TV show. There are also opportunities for the ThunderCats leader to hop into a flying vehicle and shoot down foes or grab a handy gun, which suddenly makes the onslaught a lot more manageable. By far the most interesting aspect of the game is that it's simply a retooled version of *Samurai Dawn*, as revealed by YouTube veteran Larry Bundy Jr in 2014.

## BATTY 1987



Amazingly, one of the Spectrum's best games (at least from our point of view) was actually given away for free as a covertape by *Your Sinclair*.

At its core Batty is really nothing more than an *Arkanoid* clone, which itself is just a jazzed up version of *Breakout*. It's a far superior game that greatly improves on the similar titles available at the time thanks to cleverly designed stages, a great range of power-ups and – most importantly – a co-operative two-player mode that features two players controlling half of the screen each in an attempt to clear the various wall configurations.

## LIVE AND LET DIE 1988

Released 15 years after the debut of the original film, *Live And Let Die* is a technically impressive game that has you careering around the world's waterways in a tooled-up speedboat. It looks nice, but is let down by its dull level design and weak enemy AI. US readers will recognise it as *Aquablast*.

## IKARI WARRIORS 1988

Elite did another fine job converting SNK's frantic run-and-gun, and even managed to get around the rotary control system the original arcade game used. Surprisingly, the 8-bit versions are more fun to play than the later 16-bit offerings, although they obviously take a graphical hit. There are two versions of the game on the C64, with the US release by Data East USA being absolutely dreadful.

## OVERLANDER 1988

The cover of *Overlander* suggests an exciting apocalyptic racing game in the style of *Mad Max 2* or *Roadblasters*. Sadly it's a fairly conventional offering with solid enough visuals but very little in the way of excitement. The C64 version is at least saved by a rather pleasing soundtrack by Mark Cooksey, while the Amstrad version is a weak Spectrum port.

# MUCH SCOOBY-DOO ABOUT NOTHING

**RICHARD WILCOX** ON THE MISSING SCOOBY-DOO GAME

**HOW DID *SCOOBY-DOO* COME ABOUT?**

God, I loved the *Scooby* cartoons. I still do; they're probably my favourite of all time. Not quite sure who had the idea of licensing *Scooby*. It's highly likely that I would have suggested it, but Steve would have done the deal. He was very good at tracking down who owned the rights and getting the licences, even though the TV and film companies weren't attuned to merchandising and rights exploitation like they are today.

**TELL US ABOUT THE ORIGINAL IDEA FOR THE GAME.**

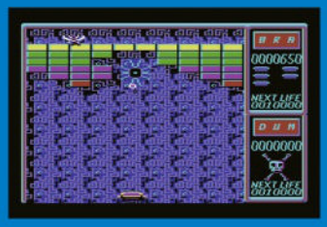
When it came to what the *Scooby* game would be the design really fell to me. I was never a great programmer and only a very mediocre designer of graphics, but I wasn't a bad games designer. I was methodical and structured even back in those days when the idea of creating a game design document before starting coding was alien. The ambitions for *Scooby* were enormous. Even though it would sell because of the licence, I wanted it to be a great game in its own right. The prototype was Don Bluth's *Dragon's Lair*, something that looked as good as any cartoon but was interactive. To me, it seemed that if we could at least distil some of the elements of that then we might have a chance of telling a real *Scooby* story and make something that felt at least a little bit like an episode of the show.

**WHY DIDN'T IT HAPPEN?**

The big difference between that game and ours would be the hardware. Theirs was pulling the animation off LaserDisc. We just had 48K of RAM in which to cram all of our animations. In our defence, we gave it a pretty good shot. I came up with what these days you might call a 'game engine' that allowed us to define and run interactive scenes. It was pretty darn powerful and allowed you to create minigames that were extremely varied. The really clever thing was that you didn't need to code each minigame separately; we had developed a scene designer tool that allowed you to do the layout and define the interactivity. This tool then encoded the levels in such a way that they could be played back in real time. Andy Williams did the coding. He was Elite's number-one programmer and, of course, he nailed it. But what killed us was the graphics. I hadn't accounted for just how much animation we would need and how long it would take and ultimately how much memory it would need… memory that, of course, the Spectrum didn't have.

**DO YOU THINK IT EVER COULD HAVE BEEN MADE?**

It was ahead of its time. A few years down the line when art teams were much bigger and machines had more memory we would have got there. I still don't think there's been a game that has combined the best elements of cartoons and games.



# GOING BATTY

**JASON BENHAM** ON HIS POPULAR ARKANOID CLONE

**WHAT'S THE STORY BEHIND *BATTY*, JASON?**

The history is that I independently made an *Arkanoid* clone for the Commodore 64. Living in a small seaside town – Redcar – I had access to all the latest games in the arcades, and I could get right through to the end of *Arkanoid* with maybe a couple of continues. I wanted to make a game that could do everything *Arkanoid* could do and more, hence the enemies firing shots that stun you, the extra power-ups, the bricks you can only destroy from the top, metal walls and so on. From what I remember, *Batty* took around three or four months to create while working at home.

**HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT GETTING THE GAME PUBLISHED?**

I originally submitted the game to Superior Software in Leeds, who had published my previous C64 game *The Legend Of Sinbad*, but the guys there felt it was too close to the upcoming licensed versions of *Arkanoid* for comfort and passed on it. I then discovered that Elite Systems was looking to put out an *Arkanoid* clone on multiple platforms. Elite scooped it up and I was paid a lump sum, maybe £4,000 or so, from what I remember. Despite making games on the VIC-20 and C64 since 1982, it was the first game where I actually got paid a decent amount!

**DID ELITE ASK YOU TO MAKE ANY DESIGN CHANGES TO THE GAME?**

Elite requested a few small changes. I was asked to improve the graphics for the bat and change the intro music a little as I had completely copied it from *Arkanoid*! The magnetic field that would deflect the ball was also requested later on. Aside from that, everything else was in my original submission. The extra power-ups, aliens firing and multiplayer mode were ported to the other platforms based on the C64 version.

**DID YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE SPECTRUM AND AMSTRAD VERSIONS?**

I never dealt directly with the guys making versions for other platforms, so there wasn't really any parallel development except when adding features at the end. The magnet-in-the-playfield idea was taken from either the Amstrad or Speccy version. It's the main feature over which I had little design input.

**WERE YOU HAPPY WITH HOW THE GAME TURNED OUT?**

The feature I'm most proud of is the two-player mode. I know other games from that era did something similar – *TRAZ* maybe – but it added a lot to the frenetic gameplay. I was upset that it was never released as a standalone product. I think it only came out on the *Hit-Pak* collection.

**IT WAS RELEASED ON ELITE'S BUDGET LABEL AS WELL. HOW DO YOU THINK BATTY HELD UP TO THE MANY HOME VERSIONS OF *ARKANOID*?**

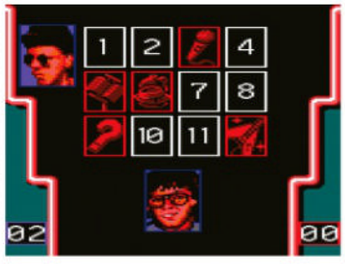
I was very pleased with the game, especially compared to the original *Arkanoid*. The sequel, *Revenge Of Doh*, had a few cool power-ups that mine didn't have, but the two-player mode in *Batty* really made the difference. If you got two players together who liked the game, you could just play for hours and lose track of time.

## BEYOND THE ICE PALACE 1988

■ *Beyond The Ice Palace* started life as one of Elite's *ThunderCats* games, but the company eventually changed its mind and Nick Jones (who revealed the information to website Games That Weren't C64) continued to code his adventure. The end result is a fun hack-and-slash with enjoyable platforming that should please fans of *Ghosts 'N Goblins*.

## BUGGY BOY 1988

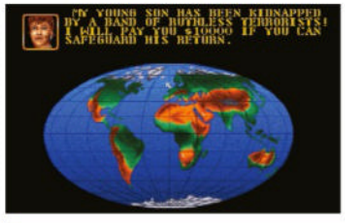
■ While none of the home systems could replicate the three-screen setup of the arcade original, the Amiga version featured here and the earlier 8-bit offerings (which arrived a year earlier) are all worth investigating. Handling is tight and responsive, the tracks offer plenty of challenge and it does a great job of capturing the bright aesthetics of Tatsumi's 1985 original.



## MIKE READ'S POP QUIZ 1989

■ Elite was never one to miss a good licence deal, and securing Mike Read's popular TV quiz was a clever call. The final game is a surprisingly authentic experience with a large range of questions. The digitised images obviously look best on the Amiga, but all the home systems are pretty good. If you're not a child of the Eighties you might want to give it a miss, mind.

ELITE WAS NEVER ONE TO MISS A GOOD LICENCE DEAL, AND SECURING MIKE READ'S POPULAR TV QUIZ WAS A CLEVER CALL



## DOGS OF WAR 1989

■ Essentially an enhanced version of *Commando*, *Dogs Of War* mixes things up by giving you a variety of missions to achieve and adds in far more varied locations for you to explore. While it's rather low on variety, the sheer amount of carnage on-screen does keep things entertaining, while the range of changing missions ensures there's a little more strategy than simply running up the screen shooting things. It's a game that's certainly worth investigating.

## MIGHTY BOMB JACK 1990

Elite's third *Bomb Jack* game (it also created a home computer sequel in 1986) is actually a port of *Bomb Jack*'s sequel, which was originally released for the NES in 1986. It's an interesting take on the earlier bomb collecting of the original, with additional focus on coins, which give Jack several abilities when collected. It lacks the accessibility and tightness of the original, but is still fun to play.

## GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH 1990

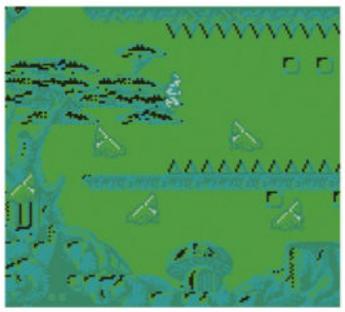
One of the last movie licences Elite was involved with was this disappointing Motivetime effort. It looks nice enough with some smart-looking environments and nicely animated gremlins, but the game itself is extremely tedious to play and far too difficult. It was well received on the Amiga, but we fail to see how.

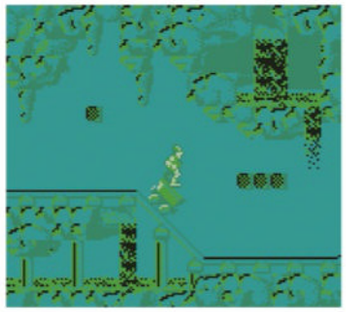
## WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SOCCER 1990

Elite ported Sega's popular Mega Drive football game to home systems the year after its release, but it probably wasn't really worth the effort. While it features a similar top-down view to games like *Microprose Soccer* and *Sensible Soccer*, it's nowhere near as much fun to play and the computer AI isn't particularly challenging. Not terrible, but there are certainly better options out there.

## TOURNAMENT GOLF 1990

This is basically another Sega conversion, this time of *Arnold Palmer Tournament Golf*. It's a perfectly serviceable adaptation of the popular sports game with some challenging courses and plenty of game modes to master. While Palmer's name is nowhere to be seen in the actual game, a loading screen still survives of him, but now he has brown hair.





## DRAGON'S LAIR: THE LEGEND 1991

Realising that it would never be able to recreate Don Bluth's stunning animation for its Game Boy licence, Elite looked instead to its back catalogue and found the perfect solution – *Roller Coaster*. The classic Spectrum game was simply retooled with brand-new Gothic backgrounds and enemies to suit the new game, and the player now controlled Dirk Daring. It works extremely well, and while the playing area is a lot smaller than before it doesn't harm how it plays.

## DR FRANKEN 1992

After a few conversions of Sega games, Elite committed to Nintendo for the 16-bit period and this was one of the company's more interesting efforts. Originally released on the Game Boy with a SNES version following a year later, it's a fun platformer where you have to search for the missing body parts of your girlfriend. A sequel followed in 1997.

## JOE & MAC: CAVEMAN NINJA 1993

Elite's port of the classic Data East platformer is a little disappointing if we're honest. While it retains the two-player mode of the arcade original, it's let down by missing animation and a low framerate. The dinos look nice and it's still fun to play, but the Amiga is capable of a lot more.

## STRIKER 1993

Elite published the SNES version of Rage Software's football game, and it's still surprisingly good fun to play. It's very arcade-like in its approach, featuring a similar pace as *Sensible Soccer* and ridiculously good goalkeepers. There are plenty of different game modes to ensure interest doesn't flag, as well as an indoor soccer option, which was quite unusual for the time.

## DIRT RACER 1995

One of the last games Elite created for the Super Nintendo was this ambitious off-road racing game that was powered by the machine's Super FX chip. It's similar in style to *Stunt Race FX*, but lacks that game's charm and well-designed courses. It was an exclusive to Europe as well.

This article first appeared in issue 205 of *games™*

# SUBSCRIBE TODAY
## AND ENJOY GREAT SAVINGS!

## SUBSCRIBE ONLINE NOW AT
## www.magazinesdirect.com/RET/DH44E
## TELEPHONE 0330 333 1113 AND QUOTE DH44E

TERMS & CONDITIONS Offer closes **1st December 2025**. Price is guaranteed for the first 6 months, please allow up to 6 weeks for the delivery of your first subscription issue (up to 8 weeks overseas) the subscription rate includes postage and packaging.*Savings are based on the cover price. Payment is non-refundable after the 14-day cancellation period. **Access to the digital library will end with your subscription. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries and overseas rates please call: +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm, Saturday 10am-3pm UK Time (excluding Bank Holidays) or email: help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle. If you are an active subscriber, you have instant access to back issues through your iOS or Android devices. Your digital magazine entitlement is available at no additional cost and no further action is required. Pocketmags library may not have access to the full archive of digital back issues.
** Access to the digital library will end with your subscription.

*Exclusive* ***Subscriber Cover*** *Every Issue!*

# *Reasons to subscribe...*

- **NEW!** Full digital access to 80+ back issues when you subscribe to print!**
- You'll never miss an issue!
- It's delivered direct to your door
- Brilliant value – save money on the cover price

# SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE

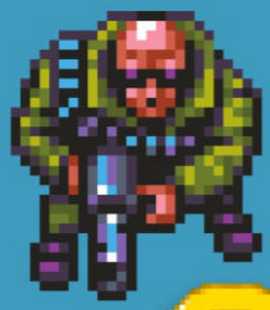
| PRINT + DIGITAL ACCESS | DIGITAL EDITION |
|---|---|
| **£21.06** | **£19.46** |
| EVERY 6 MONTHS | EVERY 6 MONTHS |

SAVE **40%***

To purchase single back issues (print format only) visit: **magazinesdirect.com** (click on 'Single issues' tab)
Or you can email: **help@magazinesdirect.com** For further help call: **+44(0)330 333 1113** Lines are open Mon-Fri 8.30am-7pm and Sat 10am-3pm UK time. Magazinesdirect.com is owned and operated by Future Publishing Limited.
Full subscription prices: £70.20 for UK, €155 for Europe, $176 for US, £135 for Rest of World.

THE MAKING OF

# THE CHAOS ENGINE 2



## IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** RENEGADE
- **DEVELOPER:** BITMAP BROTHERS
- **PLATFORM:** AMIGA
- **RELEASED:** 1996
- **GENRE:** ACTION

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**SPEEDBALL (PICTURED)**
**PLATFORM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
**RELEASED:** 1988

**XENON 2: MEGABLAST**
**PLATFORM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
**RELEASED:** 1989

**THE CHAOS ENGINE**
**PLATFORM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
**RELEASED:** 1993

**ALTHOUGH ITS SALES WERE DECIMATED BY THE DISCONTINUATION OF THE AMIGA, THE CHAOS ENGINE 2 SERVED AS A WORTHY SWAN SONG FOR THE 16-BIT SYSTEM. THE BITMAP BROTHERS FOUNDER MIKE MONTGOMERY RECALLS HOW THE STUDIO CREATED ITS INVENTIVE SEQUEL**

**WORDS BY RORY MILNE**

**It's interesting how an original game design comes together, especially one that's devised for a sequel.** More of the same is often the route taken when making a follow-up, but The Bitmap Brothers was notable for taking a different approach. Its Amiga shooter *The Chaos Engine 2* is a good example of the studio's preference for innovation over repetition. The original was co-op and based on end-to-end levels, but rather than two characters co-operating, *The Chaos Engine 2* had them compete in sequential challenges.

These protagonists shared a play area, like in the original, but the sequel introduced a split-screen display, as The Bitmap Brothers founder Mike Montgomery explains. "Simon Knight was the main designer on *The Chaos Engine 2*, and he must have played *Spy Vs Spy* a lot," Mike notes. "It was split-screen, and that was the basis of its influence on *The Chaos Engine 2*. It was about how the split-screen allowed one character to interact with the other. *The Chaos Engine* was also an influence to an extent; that was inspired by *Gauntlet* of course. But with *The Chaos Engine 2* it was a different kettle of fish. *The Chaos Engine* was obviously about shooting; it was about killing opponents, so it made sense that we also had that in *The Chaos Engine 2*. But really it was to do with having a split-screen, and how that meant you could have two competing players on one screen."

An obvious benefit of splitting the sequel's display in two was that it allowed the rivals in each half to simultaneously attempt different aspects of tasks in different areas of each stage. Polished pre-level instructions provided guidance on most of these missions, although others were left for players to work out for themselves. "I think at the time quite a lot of other games were going into production where everything was mission-based, so I think we were just towing the line," Mike assesses. "It also made sense, because if you were making a game that wasn't co-op then you really needed missions. The puzzles just added a bit of fun. We had something similar in *Gods*. Those were more like Easter eggs, but it was a similar sort of idea. The thing about the 'polish' was that it was what the Bitmaps were really good at. Attention to detail was a must for us."

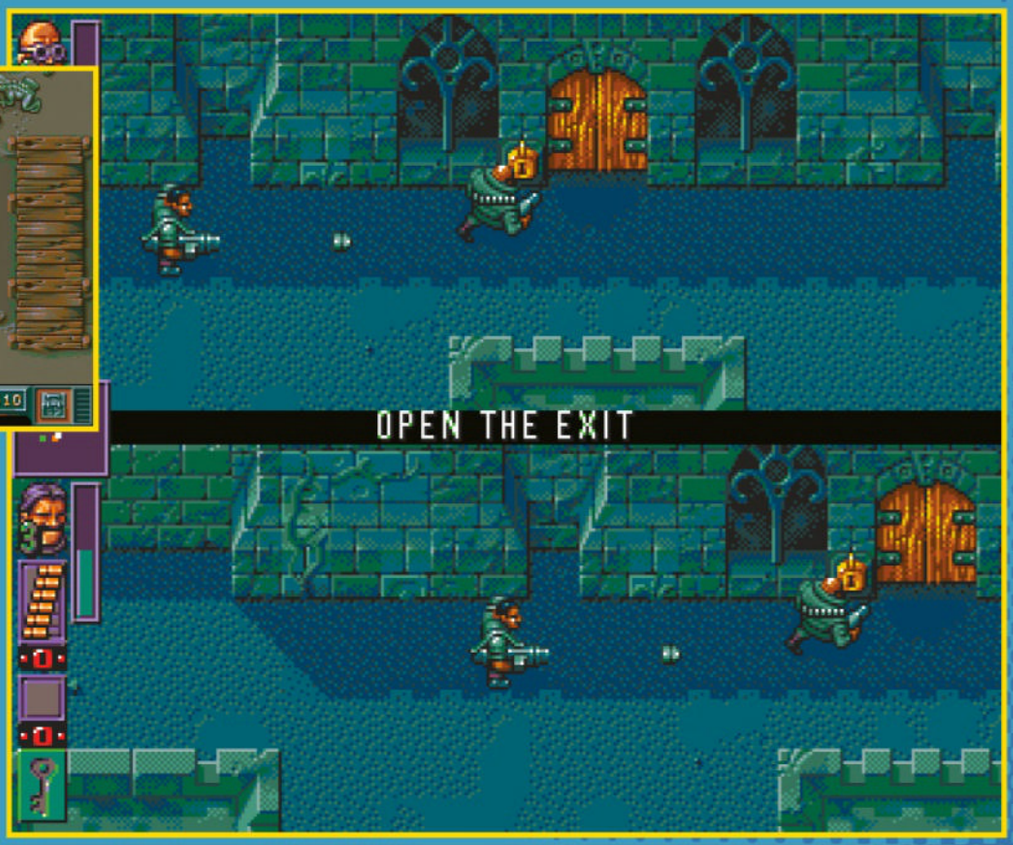
» The Bitmap Brothers founder Mike Montgomery helped to code *The Chaos Engine 2*. He's now retired.

**"WE WANTED A SILLY CHARACTER AND CONSIDERED A DINOSAUR"**
**JONATHAN TEMPLES**

» [Amiga] You can play as one of four characters in *The Chaos Engine 2*, all of which appeared in the original.

» [C64] *The Chaos Engine 2*s split-screen and competitive gameplay were inspired by the C64 classic *Spy Vs Spy*.

» [Amiga] *The Chaos Engine 2*s focus on collecting upgrades and shoot-'em-up aspect can be seen in the original game.

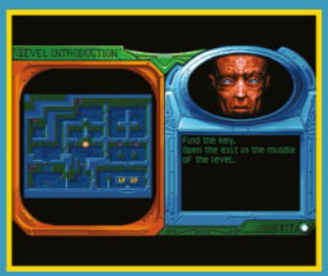



» [Amiga] Unlike the original, which has co-operative gameplay, *The Chaos Engine 2* is highly competitive.

Another area where *The Chaos Engine 2* differentiated itself from the original game was with its time-travelling storyline. This resulted in the Victorian steampunk setting of its predecessor being replaced by futuristic, mediaeval, Aztec and chaotic worlds. The payoff was eclectic visuals, enemies and collectables. "We could have different elements in each period, so it just gave us more scope rather than keeping within the boundaries of a single time in history," Mike considers. "It was pretty neat actually, because most games were set in just one time period. I can't think of many big games that did different eras. So what it gave us was that we weren't constrained by any period. It was a different experience each time you arrived in a new era; because you were experiencing *that* world at *that* time."

**Since *The Chaos Engine* had been defined by its steampunk stylings, the decision to play down that aspect of the original in the sequel wasn't taken lightly.** The first game was also reviewed to see if anything that it lacked could be addressed by its follow-up. "The original *The Chaos Engine* was based on steampunk, but of course if we had kept *The Chaos Engine 2* steampunk it would have just been in one era of time," Mike points out. "So making *The Chaos Engine 2* a steampunk game would have just limited us. We also didn't want it to be the same as the original; that was important to us. I think at the time of the original *The Chaos Engine* we put everything into it that we could think of, but games had evolved between then and making *The Chaos Engine 2*, so when we did that we thought about what else we could have done in the original."

One area where *The Chaos Engine 2* featured novel ideas not seen in the original was with its power-ups. In *The Chaos Engine* these had largely been weapon upgrades, but the follow-up favoured non-violent pick-ups that froze, teleported, cloned and made its combatants invisible. "I think that was just a case of introducing different gameplay, because *The Chaos Engine 2* wasn't all about destruction," Mike reasons. "We also didn't want to do the same as other people had done, or what we had done before. We wanted to put flexibility into *The Chaos Engine 2* by




» [Amiga] The tasks and puzzles in each of *The Chaos Engine 2*s stages are detailed before you tackle them.

» [Amiga] Challenges often involve interacting with high-tech machinery in *The Chaos Engine 2*s future world.

» [Amiga] The levels in *The Chaos Engine 2* are split into stages that have to be completed one after another.

# CHARACTER BUILDING

## THE MEMORABLE HEROES OF THE CHAOS ENGINE FOLLOW-UP

### THE GENTLEMAN

■ As well as being stylish to a tee, the Gentleman is fleet of foot. His pistol comes with just one round of ammo, and when he runs out you have to find more. His health is poorer than his competitors'.

### THE NAVVIE

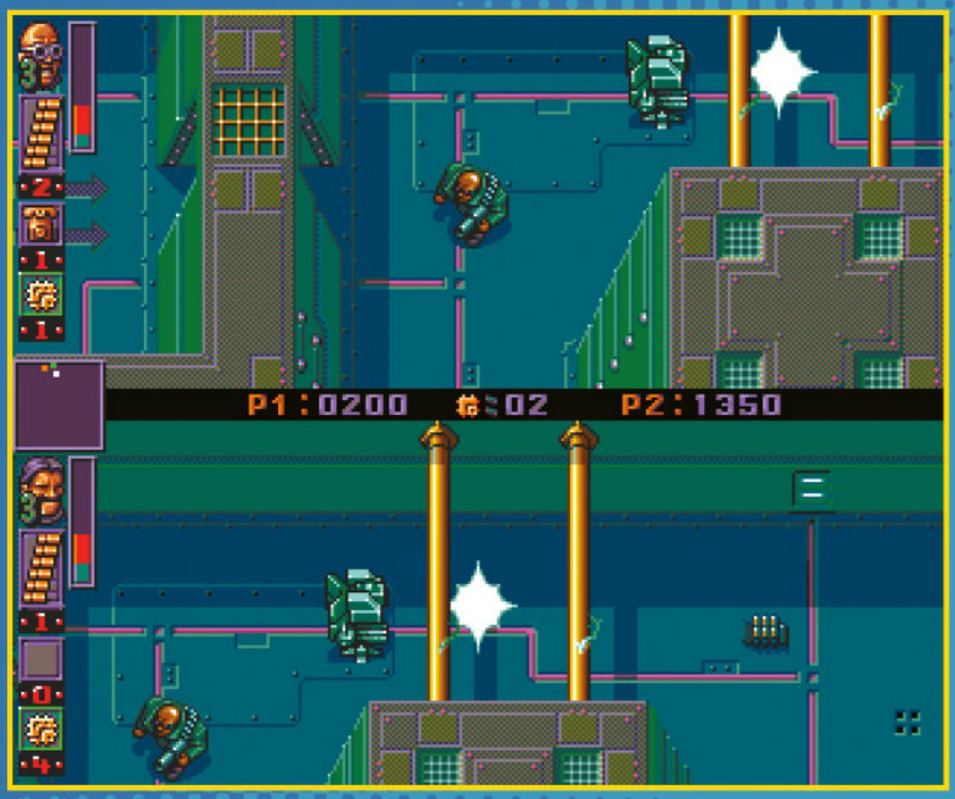
■ He may be the slowest of the four characters, but the Navvie is in rude health. He packs a bazooka that has one ammo clip to begin with and the capacity to carry a second, so it seldom needs reloading.

### THE BRIGAND

■ The very definition of an all-rounder, the Brigand is fast and fairly healthy. His rifle isn't as effective as the Navvie's bazooka, but it can carry two clips, which means less time looking for ammo.

### THE MERCENARY

■ Like the Brigand, the Mercenary is reasonably healthy and can run at pace. His Gatling gun has an impressive rate of fire and the best capacity of any weapon in the follow-up with its three ammo clips.




» [Amiga] One of *The Chaos Engine 2*s collectables lets you teleport your opponent back to the start of the level.

» [Amiga] The items you have to collect in *The Chaos Engine 2* match the themes of the game's four worlds.

» [Amiga] The space-consuming attacks and unpredictability of *The Chaos Engine 2*s mayors keep you on the move.

introducing different things, rather than building up the same things as before. Of course that also came about by changing time lines, because you couldn't take the biggest blunder buster from the Victorian era into the next time period, but you could consistently make the characters invisible to each other, and the freezing was quite clever in the way that it introduced strategy."

**Another aspect of *The Chaos Engine 2* stripped back rather than adding to the template provided by the game it succeeded.** More specifically, collectables were found lying around instead of having to be bought, in order to create a more arcade-like feel. "It was just a case of keeping the momentum going," Mike reasons. "I also think we got fed up of doing shops in our games. There was a shop in virtually all of our earlier titles; they had been a way of introducing upgrades. We wanted *The Chaos Engine 2* to be a bit different as well. To an extent shops were also a bit old hat. If you think about it, what was the point of having a shop in *The Chaos Engine 2*? Because we didn't want to stop the action; we wanted it to carry on, like a coin-op. The whole principle of the Bitmaps was coin-op really."

In keeping with this 'less is more' approach to *The Chaos Engine 2*'s power-ups, the sequel had four protagonists to the original game's six. These selectable characters were taken from the first game in order to maintain links between the two quite distinct titles. "The four we brought back were our favourite

# CONQUERING THE CHAOS ENGINE 2

## HOW TO MASTER THE SPLIT-SCREEN SCI-FI SEQUEL

### SHOOT-'EM-UP

■ If you're a mean shot then there's something to be said for taking out your rival at every opportunity and stealing what he's collected. The one drawback is that you'll always be on the hunt for ammo.

### STEALTH TACTICS

■ An effective option when playing against an AI competitor is to lean with your back against a wall to temporarily hide from their view. However you need to be quick on the draw if you're discovered.

### RISK/REWARD

■ As *The Chaos Engine 2* progresses its monsters get tougher to take down. This wastes ammo, so an alternative is to let your opposite number tackle them and then catch up with them after the deed is done.

### LAST RESORT

■ If you're in a firefight and run out of ammo there's an option that doesn't require running away. Providing you can get up close to your adversary without getting shot you can knock him unconscious. Sneaky!

» [Amiga] Arrows shot from holes in walls are one of many hazards found in *The Chaos Engine 2*s Aztec world.

ones," Mike enthuses. "Also I think that because the game was more complex than *The Chaos Engine* that it would have been silly to create another two. The original characters from *The Chaos Engine* were so strong, but there was also the point that we were making a sequel that we didn't want to be too sequel-y. At the same time we wanted people to know that it was still *The Chaos Engine*, and if we had introduced a new set of characters it wouldn't have been. We knew we had to have some connection to the original, so we chose the four strongest characters."

**The four bosses in *The Chaos Engine 2* had equally strong designs.** Each mayor looked unique and boasted multiple attacks. Their guided projectiles, aerial assaults and space-consuming offensive moves meant that standing still and spamming fire wasn't an option, and this didn't come about by accident. "The bosses fitted into the different time periods, and they worked well with the ethos of the game," Mike reviews. "I think the thing with the different attack modes was to make the boss fights different experiences. There would have been no point in putting in two that were the same. I think a lot of games put a boss in for the sake of it, and with a lot of them you just found a position and hammered the fire button. I didn't see the point of putting in a boss like that. The bosses were so well-worked just because we didn't believe in publishers dictating when a game was ready."

In the case of *The Chaos Engine 2* there was unfortunately a price to pay for this dedication, in so much as its long gestation meant that it got released just as the Amiga line was discontinued. "We didn't sell many units because the Amiga was finished," Mike acknowledges. "In fact I think we only sold 4,000. The timing was completely wrong; *The Chaos Engine 2* should have come out years earlier. We didn't know what the market was going to do, but it was the stupidest decision we ever made to carry on with it, even though I think it was one of our better games. It also came down to consoles. The Bitmaps never got onto consoles. We had a few games that *came out* on consoles, but we never worked on those ourselves. That was another mistake that we made."

» [Amiga] The final world in *The Chaos Engine 2* sees you beaming around a field of teleporters looking for batteries.

> "WE DIDN'T WANT TO STOP THE ACTION; WE WANTED IT TO CARRY ON, LIKE A COIN-OP. THE WHOLE PRINCIPLE OF THE BITMAPS WAS COIN-OP REALLY"
> **MIKE MONTGOMERY**

Decades later, Mike considers *The Chaos Engine 2* to be a great game, even if he regrets its commercial failings and hasn't played it recently due to its current asking price. That said, he nevertheless feels that it might warrant a modern-day follow-up. "If I can get *The Chaos Engine 2* running on something I might play it again, but I don't want to pay £100 for a copy!" Mike exclaims. "But I think someone who's into Amiga games now would really enjoy it, because it's different to anything else. In my eyes it's a real classic. Everything about it is unique. I wasn't chuffed with the sales, of course, and I wish we had been brave enough to move it onto a newer platform. We could have made *The Chaos Engine 2* in 3D for the PlayStation, but then again 2D games came out on the PlayStation and did really well. Maybe I should speak to Rebellion about making *The Chaos Engine 3*." ✱

» [Amiga] You sometimes have to shoot or blow-up objects to reveal required items in *The Chaos Engine 2*.

» [Amiga] In this novel stage of *The Chaos Engine 2* you shoot devices to activate bridges between platforms.

» [Atari ST] Storms can frazzle towns and people, and quickly devastate whole areas.

ST FORMAT
DON'T MISS POPULOUS 2 ON THE DISK
SOUND & VISION
Let it all out!
Discover how your ST can unleash your creative talents...
ALSO WITH THIS SPECTACULAR ISSUE £103.95 WORTH OF SOFTWARE!
NO COVER DISKS?
THEN ASK YOUR NEWSAGENT FOR THEM IMMEDIATELY

# ST FORMAT #30

MANY EARLY COMPUTER MAGAZINES SPLIT THEIR ATTENTION BETWEEN GAMES AND CREATIVITY, AND WHILE GAMES WERE THE MAIN DRAW FOR MOST OF US, TRYING OUT DIFFERENT SOFTWARE OPENED OUR EYES TO OTHER POSSIBILITIES. IN CHRISTMAS 1991, ST FORMAT READERS GOT THE CHANCE TO EXPLORE EVERYTHING THE MACHINE HAD TO OFFER

WORDS BY JAMES KONIK

## THIS MONTH IN DECEMBER 1991

Atari ST owners had plenty to look forward to this month. The upgraded STE was well established and the exciting new Mega STE was soon to launch in the UK. As well as being a highly capable games machine, the Atari ST was hugely popular with creatives and the seasonal *ST Format* magazine had something for everyone across its two packed coverdisks.

A *Populous 2* demo was this month's big hitter, along with a *Baby Jo* demo, an impressive reader game, and a double bill of creative packages, giving readers the tools to make music and graphics of their own.

## THE MAIN EVENT: POPULOUS 2 DEMO

*Populous* was a generational title. It was an early statement of 16-bit power, with its malleable landscapes populated by independent 'peeps', and ravaged by spectacular disasters unthinkable on older machines. It had been a phenomenon, propelling Bullfrog into the stratosphere of elite developers. Expectations for its sequel were high, so a *Populous 2* demo was sure to get readers excited and magazines flying off shelves.

Bullfrog's sequel ramped up the spectacle, with more Miracles, bigger disasters and a volcano that lived up to its name. Despite omitting the headline grabbing volcano, there's plenty to see in the demo. There's a lightning storm to zap your foes, a column of fire to cook any survivors and a whirlwind that can also create whirlpools if used over water. If you're feeling benevolent, you can even create trees to cheer up your own folk.

» [Atari ST] Whirlwinds are fun to use, but surprisingly survivable. You can even use them to spread your own peeps around the map.

The unique core gameplay is there too. You raise and lower land that your followers build settlements on. The more your people prosper, the more they pray, and the more power you have for Miracles. It's curiously compelling, not least because there's always far more to do than you have time for. There's also the small matter of an enemy god creating trouble for you, especially if you don't create trouble for him first.

» [Atari ST] When the blue and red peeps meet, conflict soon follows.

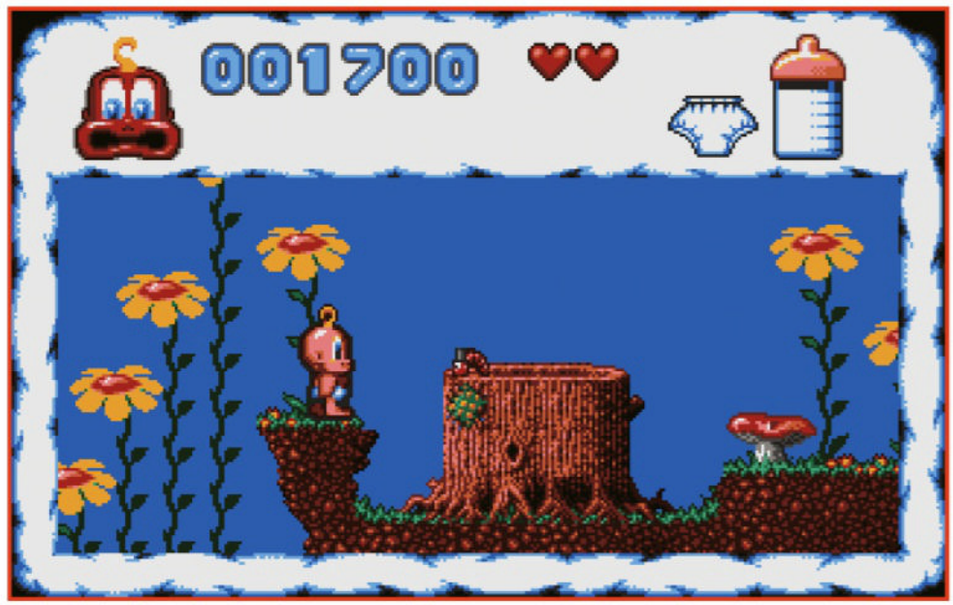
» [Atari ST] Use the whirlwind over the sea and you'll create a whirlpool. Perfect for eating away at your rival's shoreline.

It's spectacular fun, with the constraints on your Miracle use making them all the more fun to use, though tending to your own people is almost as enjoyable as wreaking havoc on the others. The demo times out after seven minutes, just as the conflict is hotting up, leaving readers hungry for more. The full game didn't disappoint. *Populous 2* was reviewed in the same issue, scoring a hefty 95%.

## PLAY THIS NEXT: BABY JO DEMO

*Baby Jo* is a likeable platformer, with a charismatic lead and a variety of enemies. You're on a journey home, and the bucolic demo level has you traversing the countryside climbing trees and bouncing between clouds. There are jack-in-the-boxes, egg-dropping birds and aggressive bees out to stop you, but you're not defenceless, and can collect sweets to hurl back at the baddies. Jo's an expressive tyke, and fun to play as. He burps after chugging milk, sucks his thumb and careens into the air with a shriek when you burn his bottom. Ed Ricketts gave the full game 79% in the same issue, calling it enjoyable and engaging, but lamenting its length and difficulty.

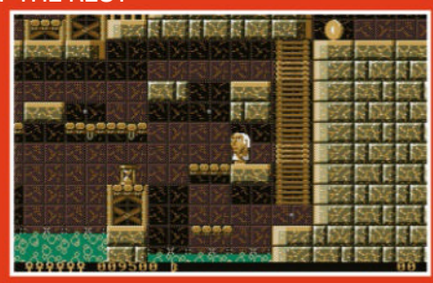
» [Atari ST] Your bottom's on fire and your nappy needs changing. Life as a baby isn't all milk and candy.



» [Atari ST] Don't be fooled; this cute caterpillar is far more dangerous than it looks.

# Covermount HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST OF THE REST



## ENTOMBED

■ *Populous* developer Bullfrog wrote a coding tutorial for *ST Format*, and one of the fruits was *Entombed*, this impressive reader game by Nick Concannon. You play a tomb builder with the daunting job of testing traps left to deter thieves. There are also prowling monsters, but you can find a bow with limited arrows to defend yourself. *Entombed* plays like a slower, meaner *Rick Dangerous*. It requires trial and error to discover the best route forward, but gets pretty good once you get the hang of it.

## BIG EYE DEMO

■ Tech demos were audiovisual displays of technical wizardry that gave the 16-bit era a lot of its underground character. This demo was written by *ST Format*'s Chris Lloyd, a former demo-coder. It features psychedelic effects, and fast-moving images played over a looped backing track. There's a guide to how it works in the mag, and the STOS Basic source code is on the disk, so keen readers could have a go at making their own slice of magic.

## SEQUENCER ONE + MIDI FILE

■ The ST was a great machine for musicians and this coverdisk included a full sequencer, letting newcomers join the party. There's a selection of instruments, and the various demos include jazz and hip-hop tracks. There was a bundled mini-manual, too.

## CANVAS

■ Canvas is a complete art and animation package, giving readers another chance to flex their creative muscles. There's also a 3D object creator, and advanced users can even create 4096 colour images, by taking advantage of Canvas' palette switch-points. Again, there was a mini-manual free with the magazine.

MAGAZINE CRAFT

# JUSTIN LEEPER

**American gaming publications don't get any bigger than Game Informer, and Justin Leeper was there at the turn of the millennium as its online ambitions grew and print circulation soared. Together, we look back at his career in games media, and how it led to a development career that has seen him work with wrestling stars, Hideo Kojima and even Transformers**

Words by Nick Thorpe

## THEN

Justin joined *Game Informer* as a web editor in 1999, and spent four years there while also working as a wrestler for independent promotions. After that, he contributed freelance articles for a variety of publications, and appeared on the screen for the videogaming channel G4TV.

## NOW

After exploring other passions including acting, writing novels and even donning the Gor-Gor costume on stage with shock rockers GWAR, Justin returned to games development and is currently working as a narrative design lead at Cloud Imperium Games.

» Justin worked as a wrestler while on *Game Informer*, preparing him well for his game development career.

**So where did your career start from, coming out of school, Justin?**

I knew I didn't want to go to university – I didn't want to spend that time and money when I didn't have a clear-cut path, so I knew I needed to get a job. I figured, why don't I try and make money at something I enjoy? So I applied at this store called FuncoLand, which was a used game store franchise. It was a fun retail job – there was some commission involved, and part of that was selling a discount card that came with a *Game Informer* magazine subscription, and I got to really like that magazine. I ended up moving down to Chicago after about a year-and-a-half, and then moving further down the US and kept my *Game Informer* subscription. Then when I found out that they were looking for some editors for their website, because the website was run by the magazine editors in their spare time, I applied for that and somehow ended up getting that gig. So I moved back up to Minneapolis and started working for them.

***Game Informer* was going through a period of rapid growth then, right?**

Yeah. I started on the website, and me and this other guy, Matthew Kato, came in and we had our own little, tiny office. The FuncoLand headquarters was in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, and we were kind of like the funky kids living in the basement of this headquarters. Me and Kato, there was a hole in the wall that said 'hole' on top of it, and that's where they put our little office. But I got to do some really fun stuff for a while there. I don't know how I swung this, but every day I would play a *WWE* game. It was before *No Mercy* and *SmackDown! 2* came out, and we had playable builds, and I would just switch off every day like, "I'm gonna go through a little bit of the story with my created wrestler." That's Helmut von Strauss, because I was learning wrestling at the same time, and then I would take some Q&A. It was such a hobby for me, but it ended up drawing giant traffic so they just let me do that basically every day, which was a lot more fun than scouring Japanese developer websites for news.

But then it came down that we were closing the website, and luckily they moved me over to the magazine so I started, I think, on issue 96 or something. But at some point, of course, GameStop bought up FuncoLand and then decided to take *Game Informer* and push it in all their stores, and that's really when our circulation jumped huge. It was just getting bigger and bigger, and I was hearing that we were in the three millions or so when I was there. You know, for as big of a magazine and as many pages as we had, there were only six or seven of us at the time. Even when I left, I think there were only maybe eight editors total, and that's really pretty small when you think that we're doing hundreds of pages and lots of reviews, and sending people out to do features and cover stories.

> "As much as I liked the website and joking around, and seeing the more 'after dark' versions of the editors, the magazine was what drew me to it"
> JUSTIN LEEPER

**Shutting the website to concentrate on the magazine does sound**

» Here's one of Justin's acting roles – a video with Japanese idol group Melon Batake A Go Go.

**odd to the modern era. How did you feel about that?**

Well, I was of course very happy to get to work for the magazine. When you get a tangible thing with your byline on it, that's really cool, it feels like quite an accomplishment. As much as I liked the website and joking around, and seeing the more 'after dark' versions of the editors, the magazine was what drew me to it. But when that switch happened, they said that we had to make two people redundant, and I was very grateful, very fortunate to be the one who got to move over to the magazine. We brought Kato back on a month or two later, and then later on we brought the website back and brought two new people in to manage that. It's just one of those goofy corporate things that they're like, "Yeah, we don't need that. OK, now we need it, and we need to start all over, because we scrapped everything that we had before."

Some of my best memories are doing a preview or review and then falling in love with the game – I remember getting the preview code for *Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness* and being like, "Holy crap, this is fun," and staying really late at night just to keep playing it. Or the first time I got assigned *Deus Ex: The Conspiracy*, the PS2 version – we were so ignorant about *Deus Ex* that when we did our top 100 for the 100th issue, we didn't even consider it because we were all very console heavy gamers. But then I fell in love with that game, and actually got to go and do the preview feature for *Deus Ex: Invisible War* which led me to meeting Harvey Smith and Warren Spector, who are such icons of game development, and getting to see what was going into their new game. So yeah, working at the magazine was just a phenomenal experience.

**So what was the *Game Informer* office like, in terms of the personalities on the team and how people got on?**

We all had our own little quirks and personalities. I was probably not the easiest person to work with. I was pretty opinionated, and as somebody who was also a pro wrestler at the time, had maybe a bit of a big ego. But we hunkered down, we got along pretty well. I really looked up to Andy Reiner, who at the time was executive editor, and he would go on to be editor in chief for quite a while, because when I was reading the magazine he was who I gravitated towards. We would hang out a whole bunch in our private time, or just sit around and play *Tony Hawk's* or *Street*

» Justin really did like *Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness*, giving it a score of 8.75 out of 10 in his review.

## My FAVOURITE COVER

"Quizzed on his favourite cover, Justin opts for issue 127, one of the later issues in his *Game Informer* run. "I got to do the *Dead To Rights II* cover story, and I was a big fan of the first game, and then I really enjoyed going to meet the team on that. Man, I don't remember offhand who did the cover, but it's some dude who did a lot of *Punisher* comic-book covers and it was super cool to have that on there." The artist in question was Tim Bradstreet, an Inkpot award winner whose other work includes concepts for the movie *Blade II* and the cover art for Iron Maiden's 2006 album *A Matter Of Life And Death*.

## I REMEMBER WHEN

### FUNCOLAND FINDS

"We got lucky, because some of the stuff we couldn't take – we only took the most mainstream things. But if somebody came in with, say, *Lunar: Eternal Blue*, *Lunar: Silver Star* and *Popful Mail*? 'Oh, we can't buy them. But let's go outside and talk…' Then I'd make them an offer and that's how I got an Atari Lynx and a bunch of games, and some of that kind of stuff."

## My LONGEST WEEK

"We were reviewing *GTA Vice City*, and we would usually do a strategy guide every issue – nothing big, maybe 8-12 pages. But I was doing the second opinion on *Vice City*, and I was maybe a bit more of a gamer than the one who was doing the main review, so I did the strategy guide. It was a 90-hour work week for me to just try and get as much as possible out of that game to put it into the guide, and even then I only got maybe 65 of the 100 hidden packages. But when I got home I just wanted to play more *Vice City*, that's how great of a game it was."

### I REMEMBER WHEN

**THE OFFICE MOVE**

"We moved from Eden Prairie – because Gamestop was based in Chicago, they closed down the FuncoLand headquarters and moved us to a nice little office in downtown Minneapolis. And while that was being built, there was like six of us editors in another tiny room, with just folding tables to hold all of our stuff on. So that was a little rough."

» *Game Informer*'s original website was shuttered in 2001, leaving Justin to move to the print magazine.

*Fighter*, any of those games, after hours a little bit. So it was good.

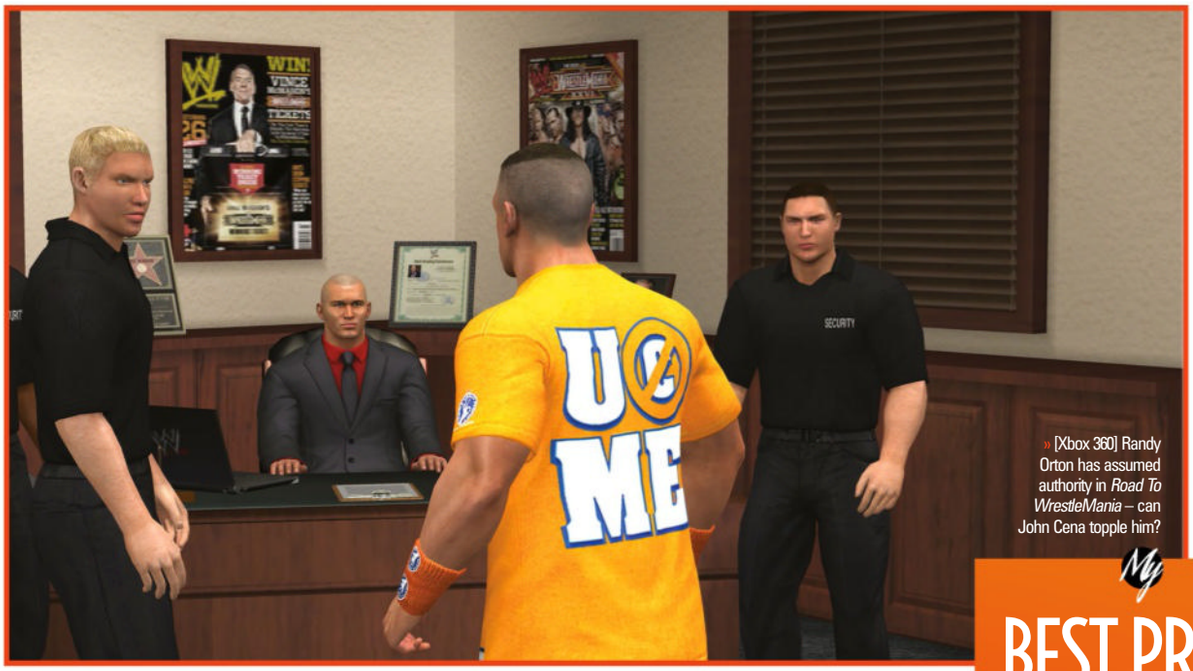
I think one thing that I benefitted from was that we would be offered to go on these press events, and nobody else wanted to leave Minnesota. It was a very insulated group. Most stuff is based in San Francisco, Los Angeles or New York, but none of them really necessarily wanted to leave the bubble, and even at E3 they would just hang out with each other. It was like, "You're gonna let me go to Las Vegas and skydive for free? Cool, sign me up!" So I would go to all that stuff that I could, and I ended up meeting some very good friends that were working at other outlets or were freelancers. It was like a second family to me, to get to hang out with all those guys, so that worked out perfectly for me.

**You left *Game Informer* in 2003, and became a contributor to a variety of other publications, including *Official Xbox Magazine*, GamesRadar and Yahoo! Games. What prompted that career switch?**

Some of the stuff that was coming down from GameStop not all of us were happy with and I was maybe more vocal about that than others, and I think that that wasn't helping. But at the same time I loved writing about games, but I wanted to make games, honestly. When I went to see *Dead To Rights II* and get to know those guys, I was like, "That's what I want to do. I want to make games and have people write about me, instead of being the one writing about other people." So that's why I left, and I thought I would have an opportunity sooner than I did, but in the meantime GameSpy, where I was friends with a lot of their guys, started giving me work right away. I became the N-Gage editor over there, and that was like a part-time job that took up quite a bit of time. Then my partner and I moved to Los Angeles, and there I was right by G4TV, so I was doing a lot of stuff with them. *Wired* was based out there too, and I was doing some stuff for *Wired*, so it was a lot more conducive to picking up work.

» The PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube were the hot systems for most of Justin's time in games media.

» Justin got to review forgotten gems like *Pathway To Glory* while covering the N-Gage for GameSpy.

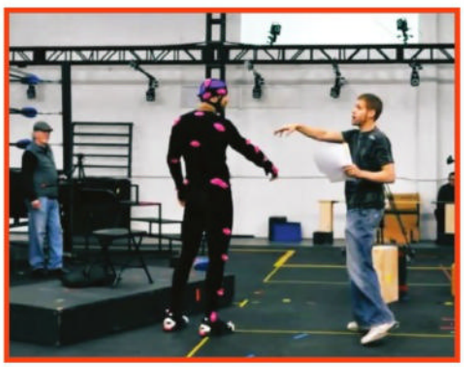


» [Xbox 360] Randy Orton has assumed authority in *Road To WrestleMania* – can John Cena topple him?

**You managed to make that move into development in 2007, working on *WWE* games at THQ. How did the opportunity come about?**
They were based outside of LA in Agoura Hills, but I knew their team, Cory Ledesma and Brian Williams. At E3 one year I interviewed Rob Van Dam, when he was both the Money In The Bank winner and the world champion, but then I did an interview with Brian Williams, and in that interview, I let him clothesline me and I took a bump, and that was a lot of fun. When they had an opening it just so happened that I was in the right place at the right time. They brought me in as a more general game designer.

Now, Yuke's was the developer, but a lot of the creative came from that THQ group. It came to pass that they weren't necessarily happy with the direction of the Story modes in the past. That was the time where they had the fairy wand that turned Edge into Daivari's voice, or they had Undertaker talking about Trish's panties – it wasn't tailored to the personalities of the talent. Me and Cory got together, and I said, "Why don't we do a story that takes advantage of this IP, of the personalities of these wrestlers? So instead of everybody being the protagonist, you have these bespoke stories, like you are John Cena, or you are Triple H," and that's how *Road To WrestleMania* came about. I started designing it, and then I wrote the scripts and designed the scenarios, and ended up eventually directing the motion capture, doing the stunt coordination, doing the casting. I was uniquely qualified to do all that stuff, because I was a writer, I was a wrestler, I had my toes in all of those pools.

> "Why don't we do a story that takes advantage of this IP, of the personalities of these wrestlers?"
> JUSTIN LEEPER



» Justin directs wrestler Claudio Castagnoli, during a motion-capture session for one of the *WWE* games.

**Why did you end up moving on from that job?**
It's a lot of pressure, making a game a year. I loved what I was doing, especially the motion-capture time, but I was also doing a lot of work and this was a time in THQ where we had wage freezes. I could credibly say that my work on *Road To WrestleMania* was pushing up review scores and pushing up sales, but I was not getting rewarded for it, so I wanted more compensation. Nothing against those guys, but the *UFC* game came out around that time and they got at least $100,000 bonuses for how that game performed. When I don't make near that for my yearly salary, and I'm putting out something that's getting pretty

## BEST PRESS TRIP

"For *Ace Combat 4: Shattered Skies*, what Namco did was they took us to Vegas, and we went to this place called Air Combat USA. You get into a fighter jet or a stunt jet with a licensed pilot, potentially former military, and you would have in air dogfights against another plane in the air. They were like, 'OK, you've got the stick now,' and you are flying these planes. There was one point where I was chasing the other guy, and we did two loops chasing him. That was one of my most memorable, amazing experiences, not just in games, but in life, because it was just so cool, and the view was just so amazing. I really took to it, they let me do some stuff that maybe they didn't let others do because I had an affinity for it, didn't get sick or anything. But yeah, that was an incredible one."

## My FUTURE CLASSIC

### ELDEN RING

"I cannot ever remember a game that just wrapped me in its talons like *Elden Ring* did. I've played over 500 hours of that, I've beaten it at least four times and the DLC twice. I think that *Dark Souls* was such a big game, and this is taking everything that *Dark Souls* was, and going, 'OK, let's make it way bigger, way more non-linear, way more options, way more approachable,' so that now everybody can enjoy what makes these games special. To mainstreamify something as niche as *Dark Souls* and still appeal to the 'git gud' snobs like myself, is such a monumental achievement. I can't sing the praises of that game enough, so I really hope that that's something that will go down and just be timeless."

### I REMEMBER WHEN

**TALKATIVE 'TAKER**

"I heard that The Undertaker did not want to record voiceover at all for *SmackDown vs Raw 2009* and I wanted to respect that. So, how do we make a story that takes advantage of his character? How do I make an antagonist that is a credible threat to him in that kind of realm? I liked Santino, I liked Finlay, and, you know, put them in a faction and have the Boogeyman be the mysterious final boss for that storyline. And yeah, I think it was absurd, but I think it fit the character."

well received from critics and from players, that makes me feel a certain way, right? So that's where I was, "Look, I gotta take a stand." Also, I was enjoying playing in this world of these characters in this IP, but I wanted to try my own worlds, something that I completely created myself. That's kind of what I was able to do [with the novels *Still Man Fights* and *The Siblings Who Shook The World*], maybe not to the success level that I had hoped for, but it was very gratifying to create the characters and universe from scratch.

> "I really put my everything into the audition, and I threw in a couple of wrestler bumps, just to show that that's part of my arsenal" JUSTIN LEEPER

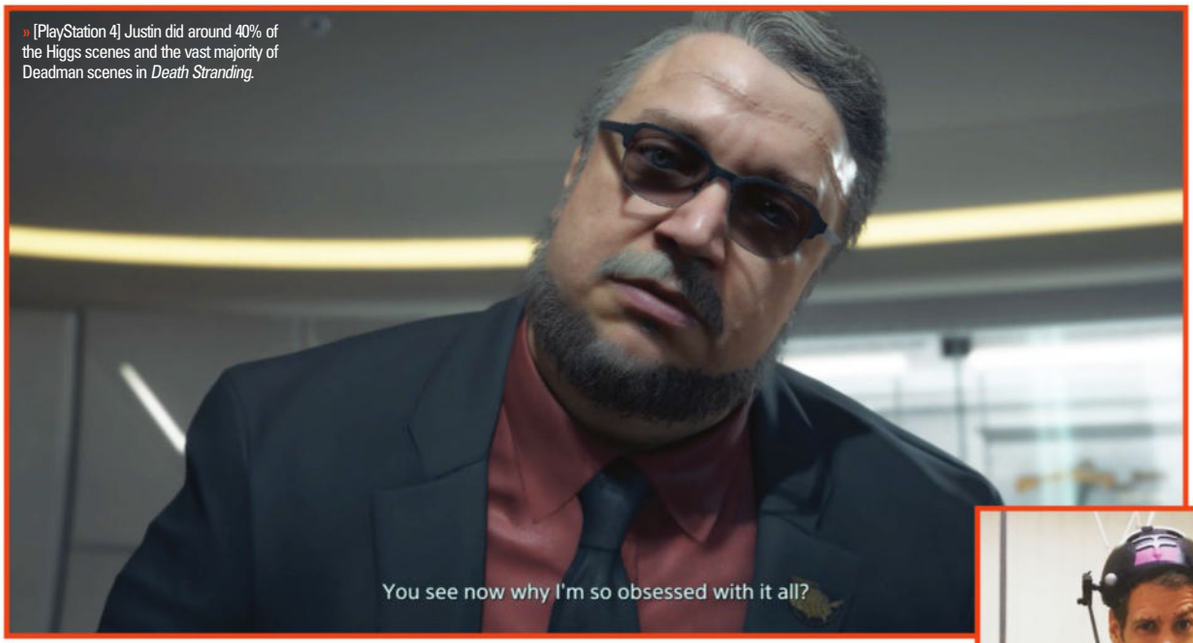
**So you're still in Los Angeles, and from there you start taking on more acting work, right?**

LA's got a gigantic stunt community and my background was in martial arts before it was in pro wrestling. I started training with a man named Robert Goodwin who trained Christian Bale for *Batman Begins*, he worked with Robert Downey Jr on *Sherlock Holmes*, so he was a very credible trainer. I worked with him for about ten years, and he taught me Okinawan weapons and swords and knives, and Hong Kong styles and all of this stuff that was a hell of a lot of fun. Because videogames is such an immobile hobby, I wanted to make sure that I was doing some kind of physical activity to compensate for that. Stunts was really in my wheelhouse, and it was honestly a lot easier than pro wrestling. When I started doing fight scenes, it was like, "Oh, cool, we can pad up and we cannot make contact because of this camera angle." Those were all luxuries that we didn't have as pro wrestlers. It was mostly extra work, but it was a really good time to work on *Justified*, *Arrested Development* and *CSI* and all of those things, and get to get to know how a professional set operates.

**You ended up moving to Japan in 2016 – how did that move come about?**

I went for the first time in 2002 to cover Tokyo Game Show for *Game Informer*. I was really blown away by Japan, and I would make a point as much as possible, whenever I had some time and some money, to take another trip. I went several times, and then just realised, 'Hey, I would sure love to live there. How can I make that happen?' Universal Studios would do these global castings for the Universal Studios Japan theme park, and I think they were looking for Terminators and Harry Potter world people. So I went to audition, and after I finished, I said, "Arigatou gozaimashita." And they said, "Oh, do you speak Japanese?" I had been studying for several years at that point, and I think that really helped me get the gig. I got cast as a wand keeper.

**You took on plenty of roles while out in Japan, but the one readers will be most interested in was your work as a motion-capture performer on *Death Stranding*. How was that experience?**




» [PlayStation 4] Justin did around 40% of the Higgs scenes and the vast majority of Deadman scenes in *Death Stranding*.

That was incredible. I'm a gigantic Kojima fan, from the first time I played *Snatcher*, I gobbled up everything. So when I got the call to audition for that, I went in there and sure thing, he was right there with a couple other people, and I told him how much his work meant to me. I really put my everything into the audition, and I threw in a couple of wrestler bumps, just to show that that's part of my arsenal. That was to do the Tokyo mocap for Higgs Monahan, who Troy Baker portrayed. So then I started doing that, and being this flamboyant character, and really my motion sort of set the tone for the voice.

At the same time, the person that they got playing Deadman wasn't working out. So they said, "You're scheduled in a day or two to shoot these Higgs scenes. Can we throw a Deadman scene in there as well?" It was seriously about a nine-minute monologue scene – it was the one with oxytocin levels and all of this other buzzword stuff. And I can't stammer over that stuff, because Deadman, he knows that like the back of his hand, So I have to know it like the back of my hand, plus do the motions. So I just drilled it into my head, went there and did my Higgs scenes, and also this one. And fortunately, they liked it enough that they said, "OK, you're going to be Deadman from now on, too."

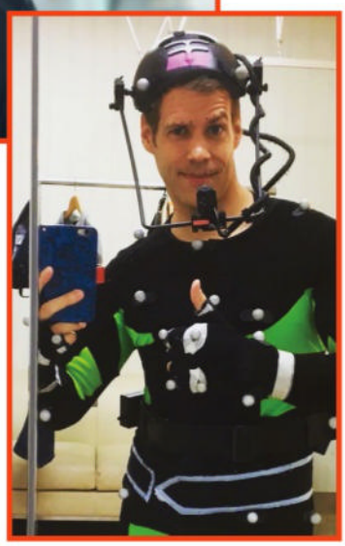
Kojima was great to work with. Not to be too spoilery, but the last scene that Deadman has in the game, I had some ideas for stuff that we could do in that scene. And Kojima-san let that stuff take place, and it's a scene that a lot of people have some emotional ties to. He let me do that and that resonated with people.

**You then worked on *AEW: Fight Forever* in Japan, before moving to the UK in 2022. Why make another international move?**

[*AEW: Fight Forever*] was a wonderful experience, but that was only a ten-month contract. When that ten months was coming up, I was like, "Do you guys want me to stick around?" They were not getting to me quick enough on what, to me, was a major decision. So I started looking around and Splash Damage reached out to me, and they needed a lead narrative designer for *Transformers: Reactivate*. I worked over there in Bromley for two years, and unfortunately, that game ended up getting cancelled. Game development is a shit show about 85% of the time, and I think that that game really struggled to find an identity, to find a scope, and when you've spent five years and how many hundreds of millions already, I don't blame a publisher or a financial backer for losing faith in that project. To be honest, Tencent who own Splash Damage were probably more patient than they needed to be.

**Now that you're at Cloud Imperium Games, how has your role changed and what are you working on?**

Now I am managing a dialogue team, and I am not a dialogue designer – I do not know Reaper or Wwise nearly as well as my team does. So my job now is to keep the road clear in front of them, keep the obstacles out, keep the surprises down, keep them engaged and with the resources that they need to do their best work. So we can keep working on *Star Citizen*, which is a gigantic persistent universe MMO, and also trying to get *Squadron 42* completed, which is a very ambitious narrative-based first-person shooter, with Mark Hamill, John Rhys-Davies, Gillian Anderson and Gary Oldman in the cast. And just trying to make that a great experience for people when they hopefully get to play it in about a year. *



» Justin dons the motion-capture suit on the first day of shooting for *Death Stranding*.

## I REMEMBER WHEN

**SPEEDY SIGN-UP**

"As I left [the *Death Stranding* audition], Imaizumi-san, who was a producer at Kojima Productions – he was a CG artist on *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*, which is one of my top five games of all time – he was like, 'You did really good," and that made me feel great. On the train home, you don't normally answer your phone on the train, but I did, and my manager was like, 'You got the job.' That was the quickest I had ever received an offer after an audition."

# 戦ALESTE
## せんじんアレスタ

VISITING A JAPANESE GAME CENTER IS ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA. NOT ONLY FOR THE CLASSICS, BUT ALSO FOR MODERN RELEASES LIKE M2'S SENXIN ALESTE – A GAME THAT FEELS LIKE A WONDERFUL HYBRID OF CLASSIC ALESTE AND CAVE-STYLE BULLET HELL SHOOTING!

WORDS BY THOMAS NICKEL

### IN THE KNOW
- **PUBLISHER:** M2
- **DEVELOPER:** M2
- **RELEASE:** OUT NOW
- **PLATFORM:** ALL.NET P-RAS MULTI
- **GENRE:** SHOOTER

**DAISUKE KOIZUMI**

■ Daisuke Koizumi used to work for cult developer Cave. Before directing and designing *SenXin Aleste*, he worked on the excellent *Rolling Gunner*.

**NAOKI HORII**

■ As CEO of M2, Naoki Horii served as producer on *SenXin Aleste*. His huge level of trust in his teams makes for lots of freedom and excellent results.

**After acquiring the *Aleste* licence, Japanese developer M2 wasn't just content bringing classic games to modern hardware; it also quickly announced a brand-new game named *Aleste Branch*.** While we're still holding out for this nearly completed project, another game called *SenXin Aleste* was released to Japanese Game Centers on 15 July 2021 – right in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What might seem like bad timing today actually had a profound impact on the game's design, as producer and M2 CEO Naoki Horii explains. "Game centers were almost empty during the pandemic, which ironically lowered the bar for positive news such as new releases. This in turn led to the emancipation from the '100 yen-per-3-minutes' rule. Among the Japanese arcade developers, it is tacitly understood that a game should be designed so that a player will expend a hundred yen for three minutes of gameplay. *SenXin Aleste*, however, is a game that you can play for ten or twenty minutes with a single coin!"

That is, especially for a shooting game, unusual and a factor that makes *SenXin Aleste* rather unique. Over the course of its five stages, the game sports beautiful pixel art, a banging soundtrack and some spectacular bosses, but it's the balance between accessibility and challenge that makes *SenXin* stand out. New players starting on a lower difficulty setting are going to have a great time, but thanks to smart scoring mechanics, professional high-score chasers are also served well. The most prominent aspect, however, are the game's four playable characters.

> "SENXIN ALESTE IS A GAME THAT YOU CAN PLAY FOR TEN OR TWENTY MINUTES WITH A SINGLE COIN!"
> NAOKI HORII

Many previous *Aleste* games featured charismatic heroines in their artwork and cutscenes, but in *SenXin Aleste*, the four pilots, designed by Yoshiyasu Matsuhita, are front and centre, as director Daisuke Koizumi explains. "I thought about how I could make it easier for the players to feel attachment to the weapons, and came up with the idea of anthropomorphising them: a weapon corresponds to a character, and the weapon's characteristics are represented in the character's personality. *Aleste* games traditionally have eight weapons to choose from, but I felt that having so many would make it hard for the player to learn which does what, even with the help of anthropomorphism, so I decided to halve the number to four."

The changes went deeper though. "I proceeded to define each weapon/character's traits," explains Koizumi. "Yuri would be straightforward and honest, her weapon would be simple forward shots. Ratna would be a genius pilot, her weapon would be based on the weapon number 0 from the original *Aleste*, allowing you to control the direction to fire in. Tanya would be cool and analytic, and her weapon would have 'widespread' and 'concentrated' modes, suited for different situations. Kexin finally would be gentle and caring, her weapon would have defensive capabilities, blocking enemy bullets."

By picking the corresponding item, players change their characters and thereby their weapon – and if they get hit, they don't lose a life, but the pilot will be incapacitated for a

**TATSUHIKO KASUGA**

■ A longtime employee of M2, Tatsuhiko Kasuga often worked on data conversion, arranging and programming before composing the score for *SenXin Aleste*.

» [Arcade] With chunky pixels and bold colours, *SenXin Aleste* brings to mind classic Nineties shooters.

» [Arcade] A complex scoring system keeps experienced shooter fiends happy.

» [Arcade] Each pilot brings a different bonus as a leader. Yuri, for example, strengthens all shots.

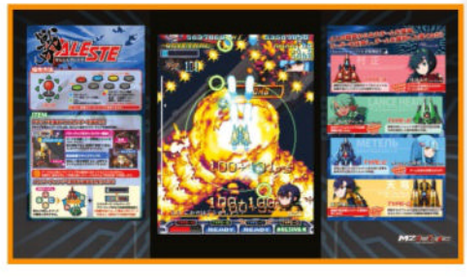
while, slowly recharging while another one takes over – that allows for spectacular comebacks from seemingly hopeless situations. With colourful graphics and well-balanced gameplay systems taken care of, that leaves the third pillar of a great shooting game, the soundtrack.

**Tatsuhiko Kasuga, who has been with M2 for a long time, talks about his work on the game's music.** "From the beginning the graphics were supposed to be on the low-res side, and we decided on using FM for the music fairly early on. The first things I did was write a homebrew sound driver and an MML compiler, so that I could work faster with tools tailored to my needs. The game stages had fixed progression, so I composed the songs in such a way that they would synchronise with gameplay events, like a mid-boss appearing etc. In the earliest stage of the development, I considered incorporating elements of music from my favourite *Aleste* titles, but after some discussion, Koizumi-san and I decided not to do that, to underline the all-new nature of *SenXin Aleste* – except for the song for the last stage, in which I paid homage to the original *Aleste* by including some elements of its music."

So that just leaves one question: what about a home port? After four years, *SenXin Aleste* is still a Japanese arcade-exclusive game! So we had to ask Naoki Horii if *SenXin Aleste* could ever make its way to consoles and computers. "Regarding a more accessible way to play *SenXin Aleste*, I will continue giving it serious thought, as I too want to be able to play the game at home! But I have to put it off for some time, because director Koizumi is busy with another project right now." Here's hoping a home release becomes a reality. ✱

» [Arcade] Due to the screen format of the arcade machines, there's additional information on the left and right of the playing area.

» [Arcade] Collectable P-Orbs are a longtime staple of classic *Aleste* games.



# MORE MODERN ALESTE

**SenXin Aleste is not the only modern Aleste game from M2**

■ Since the end of 2020, M2 has proven that the *Aleste* licence is in very good hands. While the excellent *Aleste Collection* for PS4 and Switch still hasn't reached the West yet, it contains some superb games, including the Game Gear and Master System releases and *GG Aleste 3*, a brand-new game in the series. *SenXin Aleste* is an excellent arcade game that you've just read about, but there's still more to come from M2. *Zaleste*, a crossover of *Zanac* and *Aleste* is supposed to come out in 2025 for Switch, PS4 and PS5, while the stunning *Aleste Branch* is said to be almost ready for release, but held up due to other projects the developers are currently working on. We can't wait!

ULTIMATE GUIDE

# MORTAL KOMBAT 3

THIRTY YEARS AGO, MIDWAY LOOKED TO MAINTAIN ITS GRIP ON THE ARCADE FIGHTING GENRE WITH THE RELEASE OF MORTAL KOMBAT 3. BUT COULD LIGHTNING REALLY STRIKE THRICE? JOIN US AS WE REVISIT THE FINAL ACT OF THE SERIES' 2D HEYDAY. PREPARE FOR KOMBAT…

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

***Mortal Kombat 3* swept into arcades on a wave of hype, bluster – and absolute inevitability.** The first two games, released in 1992 and 1993, had already established the series as an arcade juggernaut, an entertainment phenomenon. At a time when a solid coin-op hit sold maybe 4,000 units, the original *Mortal Kombat* shifted 24,000. The sequel did 27,000. That alone generated more than $1.1 million in revenue for publisher Midway. Add in the many home conversions of both games, which achieved sales of 11m, and the series was steamrolling towards the $2b mark. And that's without all the other stuff – comics, action figures, movie deals and plastic lunch boxes.

When it came to a third game, the 'if' was redundant, the 'when' was April 1995. For fans experiencing the coin-op for the first time, wondering what secrets and surprises the *Mortal Kombat* team had cooked up, there were clues on the cab itself. The side-art displayed series boss Shao Kahn and a new character – Sindel, Khan's queen. She was one of seven playable characters that were added to the now 15-strong roster. Now obviously it's always tricky to introduce new characters into an established line-up and *Mortal Kombat 3* suffered more than most in this regard. In particular fans seemed unimpressed with newcomers Sheeva (a female Goro-alike) and Stryker (an everyman cop). Worse were the characters that had been dropped to make way. There was no Kitana, no Raiden, no Scorpion even. On the plus side, Kano and Sonya returned to the series after sitting out *Mortal Kombat II* and were blessed with new moves.

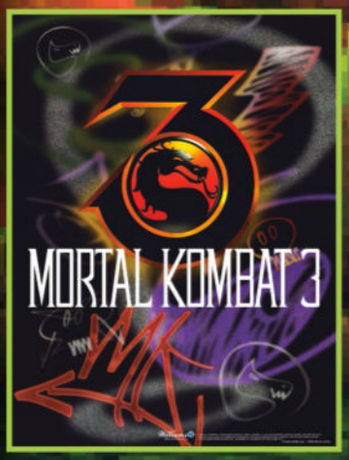
» [Arcade] In a new feature, you could uppercut your opponent into the stage above. Here, Kano exits The Bank via the ceiling.

Talking of new moves – a quick glance at the control panel revealed the new Run button. This was added to speed up the action and also counter overuse of the Block button, giving attacking players an advantage. To balance its use, a Run Meter was added which depleted when you ran and also when you performed combos. Ah yes, Chain Combos, or Dial-A-Combos, were introduced to the series with *Mortal Kombat 3*. These were multi-hit strikes that players would quickly dial-in to deal massive damage to their opponent. The trouble was: the combos were generally unique to each character, so players had to first discover them, then *memorise* them. The CPU didn't have such issues, which meant that in one-player games, you'd often have to endure your opponent rattling off a sequence of moves, straight into your face, while you futilely hit the Block button.

To reduce the chances of getting routinely battered by the CPU, three difficulty towers were introduced: Novice, Master and Warrior. Each pathway ended with a final fight against Shao Kahn, but now there was a new sub- ▶

» [Arcade] Note Johnny Cage's headstone in The Graveyard. According to series lore, he died prior to the events of *Mortal Kombat 3*.

"FANS SEEMED UNIMPRESSED WITH NEWCOMERS SHEEVA AND STRYKER. WORSE, THERE WAS NO KITANA, NO RAIDEN, NO SCORPION..."




» [Arcade] Leaving behind Eastern-themed and fantastical settings, several stages were set in a city modelled on New York.

# KOMBAT

» [Arcade] New sub-boss Motaro can be a formidable foe. Avoid his tail and hind legs!

» [Arcade] Final boss Shao Kahn is hardly subtle when it comes to hammering home a point.

## THE STAGE IS WET

### DISSECTING THE SPECIAL STAGE FATALITIES

#### THE SUBWAY

■ Stand clear, a train is arriving! The finisher sees you uppercut your opponent onto the tracks in the background – at which point a train speeds into the station and wipes them out.

#### THE BELL TOWER

■ In Shao Kahn's tower, your dazed opponent will fall five floors before a lethal bed of spikes breaks their fall. And we thought acupuncture was supposed to promote healing.

#### THE PIT III

■ In the third incarnation of The Pit, you can launch the loser from the platform and watch as they tumble helplessly into rotating blades. Cue an explosion of limbs, bones and blood.

PRESERVED GOOD OLD GAME BY GOG

20%
OFF YOUR FIRST GOG PURCHASE USING CODE
RETROGOG20
(ONE-TIME USE)

# KONVERSION Q&A

## WE TALK TO HAYDN DALTON, THE GRAPHICS GUY BEHIND THE GAME GEAR CONVERSION

» Haydn pictured with the *Mortal Kombat 3* cab at the Software Creations office. "It was a proud moment," he says.

**REPLICATING AN ARCADE MONSTER LIKE *MK3* ON THE GAME GEAR WAS HUGELY AMBITIOUS…**

We did have concerns. Right from the start we were well aware that we were given a momentous task for such a beloved franchise. Plus, it was just a two-man team working on the Game Gear version – me, doing the graphics, and the programmer, Mike Ager. Not only was it a difficult task, but we were also given very little time to convert it. I recall it was around three months. We did a lot of long days and nights, but I honestly loved my time at Software Creations, irrelevant of its pressures.

> "WE WERE GIVEN VERY LITTLE TIME TO CONVERT IT"

**GIVEN THE LIMITATIONS OF THE HANDHELD SYSTEM, HOW DID YOU APPROACH THE CONVERSION?**

The client was *very* protective over *MK3*, so we weren't given an official moveset for all the characters. All I had to go off were some guides put online by people who had played early versions of the arcade game out in the wild. I had to go through all of those moves for all of the characters – and then reduce the movesets due to memory limitations.

**WHAT WAS THE PROCESS WITH THE GRAPHICS? WERE YOU ABLE TO ADAPT THEM FROM ANOTHER VERSION?**

We pulled the graphics directly off the board of the arcade game we had in our office. For the characters, I created a batch file using Image Alchemy to scale their size and reduce the colour palettes. There was lots of trial and error until I got the results I wanted, and even then there were some hand tweaks required. For the backgrounds, we had a ridiculously low character/block count, as most of our energies were spent making the fighters look good. This resulted in much reduced, very primitive-looking backgrounds. I think I got great results for the character select and versus screens – I was very happy with them at the time.

**THE GAME GEAR VERSION HAS ALMOST NO BLOOD. WERE YOU ASKED TO TONE IT DOWN?**

I honestly can't remember what the guidelines for blood were on this version of the game. We did bring blood visuals over, but I don't know how much was used.

**THERE'S ALSO A MASTER SYSTEM VERSION THAT WAS SEEMINGLY ONLY RELEASED IN BRAZIL. DID YOU PRODUCE THIS TOO?**

Yes, but I didn't know it was released at the time. Originally, we'd missed the tight deadline to get it released and so the project, from our side at least, was canned, never to see the light of day. It was only years later I saw it had been released. It looked as if they'd just finished up what was missing from our version and released it.

**THE MK CONVERSIONS WERE ALL BIG SELLERS. DID YOU REAP THE REWARDS AT THE TIME?**

Mike and I never saw anything from it other than our normal wage.

» [Game Gear] Although slated for a global release, the Game Gear version was only released in Europe and Australia.

» [Game Gear] Kung Lao, Liu Kang, Jax, Stryker, Nightwolf and Shang Tsung were all dropped from the Game Gear version.

# KONVERSION KAPERS

## WHICH OF THE HOME VERSIONS HIT HARDEST?

### PLAYSTATION

■ The only 32-bit console version is admirably close to the coin-op. The sprites are slightly smaller but they're very close, and stereo sound has been added (the original is mono). Load times are a pain, messing up Shang Tsung's transformations, but you can toggle those off.

### SUPER NINTENDO

■ The game hits the SNES without too much of a downgrade, with shrunken sprites, less detailed backgrounds and compressed audio samples being the main compromises. This is a very playable conversion, though maybe not quite as impressive as *Mortal Kombat II* on the SNES.

### MEGA DRIVE

■ While this is almost identical to the SNES version, content-wise, it's less vibrant thanks to the MD's smaller colour palette. But the animation is perhaps slightly smoother... So who triumphs in the SNES vs MD 16-bit showdown? The SNES, for us, although it's a points win.

### PC (DOS)

■ Of the two PC versions, the DOS release is closest to the coin-op. In fact, if it wasn't for the slightly muted visuals, it would be almost arcade perfect. Plus, as it's installed, there are zero load times to slow things down. All you need is a decent controller to play it with.

boss, Motaro, to contend with. Motaro was a classic fantasy character, a horned Centaurian, and you challenged him in his gloomy lair, but elsewhere the game reflected more contemporary, Western influences. This was due to the backstory, which saw the Kahn's Outworld invade the Earthrealm (or something – we don't have the space, nor frankly the desire to delve into the 'plot' here). This resulted in more grounded stages, including ones set in a city street, a subway system and even a bank.

» [Arcade] The new Animality finisher sees the victor transform into a beast before delivering the killer blow.

**It was now possible to propel an opponent (typically using an uppercut) straight through the ceiling and into another stage above**. This was cool, and comedic, and in keeping with the game's generally lighter tone compared to *Mortal Kombat II*. Fatalities were back, obviously, and they were less gruesome, more goofy this time around. Babalities and Friendships also returned, along with a new finisher, an Animality, where you'd transform into a beast and maul the loser to death. To perform an Animality you first had to perform a Mercy – which granted your opponent a smidgen of their health back – then beat them a second time, at which point the Animality could be unleashed.

The final new feature of note was the Kombat Kode system. The first two games both featured shed-loads of secrets and *Mortal Kombat 3* followed suit with a bunch of game modifiers and unlocks – only now the way you obtained them was brought front and centre. Before each versus match, each player selected three different symbols. These kodes were revealed in the game itself and also appeared in the game's marketing activity and, of course, magazines and playing guides. One kode was even included in the 1995 *Mortal Kombat* movie (look sharp, it's written on the wall during the fight between Liu Kang and Reptile).

"IT WAS NOW POSSIBLE TO PROPEL AN OPPONENT STRAIGHT THROUGH THE CEILING AND INTO ANOTHER STAGE ABOVE"

The arcade game received a mixed reaction on its debut. The UK edition of *Sega Magazine* highlighted this in its review, "There are two very different initial reactions to *MK3*, with some fans loving it instantly and others complaining that it's the same as before. It certainly has new features and characters in abundance... but do they help make the game better than the mighty *MKII*? In short, yes." A contrasting view was offered by US magazine *Next Generation*. "It's hard to imagine, after playing *MK3*, that there will be much call for an *MK4*, at least not in its current form," it

» [Arcade] In addition to the standard Kombat Kodes, there was a special nine-character combination you could enter to unlock Smoke as a playable character.

» [Arcade] Meta-Fatality! Liu Kang morphs into a 400lb *Mortal Kombat* cab and flattens his opponent. Outstanding.

## PC (WINDOWS)

■ Unrelated to the DOS release, this is actually a port of the PlayStation version. As such, it's a solid conversion, but it suffers from the same key shortcoming – load times. There's a CD release that contains both versions… we're betting that most PC owners went C:\>mk3.

## GAME BOY

■ Converting *Mortal Kombat 3* to the monochrome Game Boy was surely a fool's errand. It plays OK, but it's so light on content, featuring just five stages and nine fighters, plus it's missing many special moves and finishers. A step-down from the GB version of *Mortal Kombat II*.

## GAME GEAR

■ Like the Game Boy version, this only includes five stages and nine fighters (although Noob Saibot can be unlocked). It also has the unfortunate distinction of being the only conversion to lack in-game music. But, the colour graphics elevate it above the muddy Game Boy version.

## MASTER SYSTEM

■ A quick and dirty port of the Game Gear version, featuring the same content quota. The screen area has been extended and in-game music has been added, but the graphics are less colourful. The fact this only received a limited release is not a huge shame, we have to say.

» [PC DOS] Babalities return in *Mortal Kombat 3* – and remain perhaps the most pointless finisher.

» [Mega Drive] The 16-bit Sega version is generally very good, although it does suffer from grainy backgrounds.

commented, pointing to the 3D fighters that were starting to emerge. "In an industry that depends on innovation, *MK3* just doesn't deliver."

*Mortal Kombat 4* would soon arrive and indeed abandon its 2D roots, taking its first (faltering) steps into 3D, but before that there was still plenty of mileage left in *Mortal Kombat 3*. First up were the home conversions which arrived in October 1995. If you were questioning the value of the series at this point, consider this – Sony paid Midway a reported $12m for a six-month exclusive release window on next-gen consoles. As a result, the mooted versions for the Saturn, Jaguar and 3DO were all bumped into 1996, before all three were ultimately cancelled.

> "SONY PAID MIDWAY A REPORTED $12M FOR A SIX-MONTH EXCLUSIVE RELEASE WINDOW ON NEXT-GEN CONSOLES"

**Then in November 1995, Midway released its arcade upgrade, *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*.** This significant revision introduced new modes, new stages and crucially recalled several popular characters who were absent from the original release. Many believed this was done to placate fans who bemoaned those missing characters, but series co-creator John Tobias refutes this. "Leaving them out had nothing to do with provoking *UMK3*," he told mortalkombatonline.com in 2012. "*UMK3* was done to appease arcade operators and make up for the sooner than usual release of *MK3*'s home version by keeping the arcade version fresh."

This makes sense, as the arcade versions were Midway's golden goose at the time. Yet the earning potential of the new CD-based systems was clear, and in October 1996, the second revision of *Mortal Kombat 3*, titled *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*, arrived on PlayStation. Co-creator Ed Boon revealed their thinking behind the title on Twitter in 2013. "When we were going to release *UMK3* on consoles, it seemed odd to release it on the PlayStation without doing something 'special' for it," he posted. "Since the PS1 had so much space (CD drive) we decided to include the MK and *MKII* assets and call it *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*. It sold HUGE!" This content-rich collection was also released for PC and Saturn, as well as non-CD systems the Nintendo 64 and (lawks) Game.com. The SNES and Mega Drive received a version of *UMK3* instead.

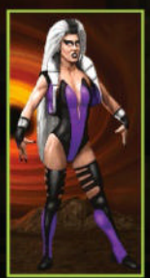
*Mortal Kombat Trilogy* was the final iteration of *Mortal Kombat 3*, but chucking in *every* kombatant (including previously unplayable bosses) did lead to a number of bugs and balancing issues. As such, *UMK3* is widely accepted as the definitive version of *Mortal Kombat 3*, especially when it comes to competitive play. Whether or not it's the pinnacle of the original 2D trilogy is something fans will continue to argue over. ★

» "The Big 3!" Fighting games dominate the July 1995 cover of *Mean Machines Sega* magazine.

# NEW KOMBATANTS

## EIGHT CHARACTERS MADE THEIR DEBUT IN MK3

### SINDEL



After 10,000 years of being dead, the bride of Kahn is understandably furious. Her scream will stun opponents when used at close range, and she can spit fast-moving fireballs. Oh, and she can fly around the screen too, which is perfect for evading most attacks.

### STRYKER

Series whipping boy Kurtis Stryker enters the fray with a riot baton and a pocket full of grenades to help him restore order. The baton is actually great for clonking enemies up close, while high grenades should be used against opponents who favour air attacks.

### SEKTOR

One of three cybernetic ninjas (the others being Cyrax and Smoke). Sektor's offence involves missiles of both the straight and homing variety – the latter are very handy against invisible opponents. He can also teleport towards his rival and unleash a deadly uppercut.

### CYRAX

The second cybernetic ninja is armed with a capture net that is effective against most enemies, pulling them in and stunning them. Be careful though – if it doesn't connect he'll be vulnerable. He can also teleport and fling bombs around the screen.

» [Arcade] Sub-Zero returns to chill out more opponents, only now he is curiously unmasked.

» [Arcade] It's anyone's fight as Cyrax and Nightwolf face off against each other.

# INSERT KOIN

## HOW TO PLAY MORTAL KOMBAT 3 TODAY

If you're itching to revisit *Mortal Kombat 3* then the game release gods are smiling down on you right now. The new *Mortal Kombat Legacy Kollection* from Digital Eclipse is a wonderful celebration of the series' arcade era and includes the coin-op version of *Mortal Kombat 3* plus the SNES and Mega Drive conversions. The game's revisions – *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* and *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* – are also included, plus an interactive documentary that chronicles the franchise's early history.

For PC owners, an alternative is the *Mortal Kombat 1+2+3* value pack from GOG. Note however that these are the original DOS conversions rather than the arcade originals, although the DOS version of *Mortal Kombat 3* is pretty faithful. There's also *Mortal Kombat Arcade Kollection*, which was released in 2011 for PS3, Xbox 360 and Steam, and includes the first two games plus *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*. Sadly, it has been widely delisted, but at the time of writing, you can still download it from the PS3 store outside of North America.

You'll also find arcade *Mortal Kombat 3* on the trusty *Midway Arcade Treasures 2* collection, released for PS2, Xbox and GameCube in 2004 (versions for the PSP and PC were later released). Finally, if you're looking for an arcade recreation you'll find Midway's game on a couple of Arcade1Up cabs.

» *Mortal Kombat* creators Ed Boon and John Tobias share their memories in the new *Legacy Kollection*.

## NIGHTWOLF

Native American hero Nightwolf is armed with a hatchet and an energised bow and arrow. He also possesses the unique talent to reflect projectiles, returning them to sender. Another very useful move is his shoulder tackle which you can spam at will.

## SHEEVA

Sindel's bodyguard resembles Goro from *MK1* and even borrows his powerful stomp and fireball abilities. The Teleport Stomp is useful as both an offensive move and also for dodging attacks. Her throw is great – well it should be since she has four arms.

## KABAL

Don't let his life-support system and Cantina Bar appearance fool you – Kabal is a formidable fighter. In particular, his trademark Spin Dash opens up enemies for free hits. He can also summon a saw blade that spins beneath his opponent. Pretty sneaky that.

## MOTARO

Motaro is not playable in the arcade version. Instead you have to beat this Centaurian in order to face Shao Kahn. He's large and slow, but his attacks deal enormous damage. He likes to teleport behind you and then kick you right across the screen. Yes, he's cheap.

# Game Boy Pocket

» **MANUFACTURER:** Nintendo » **YEAR:** 1996
» **COST:** £49.99 (launch), £60+ (today, boxed), £30+ (today, unboxed)

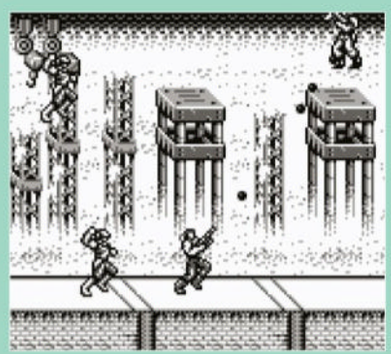
**Though it had outlasted its competitors and secured Nintendo's place as the leader in the handheld console business, there was no doubt that the Game Boy was looking just a little tired by 1996.** It was hardly the flashiest piece of technology around when it launched, and seven years had passed since then. With no major competition on the horizon, Nintendo decided to play it safe and launch a fairly conservative redesign of the system, rather than introducing a brand-new piece of hardware.

The Game Boy Pocket looks similar to its predecessor and is compatible with all Game Boy software, but is smaller and lighter. The biggest difference is found in its LCD screen, which not only does away with the green tint of the original Game Boy, but reduces ghosting considerably thanks to its faster pixel response time. The new model was a success for Nintendo – arriving in July 1996, it combined with the *Pokémon* boom in Japan to reverse a trend of declining hardware sales, keeping the platform going until the Game Boy Color arrived in 1998. ✱

## ESSENTIAL GAME

### Operation C

When picking out a game specifically for the Game Boy Pocket, we wanted something that would benefit from the improved screen technology. This handheld entry in the *Contra* series definitely fits the bill, as any extra clarity you can get is going to be beneficial in a run-and-gun where lots of stuff is happening, and this is one of the best you'll find on the platform. The original European release was titled *Probotector* and uses robotic characters, while the *Konami GB Collection Vol 1* version keeps the name but ditches the robots.



## Game Boy Pocket fact

■ The Game Boy Pocket introduced a new style of link cable connector, and requires an adapter for older link cables and devices like the Four Player Adapter that connect to that port.

**GRAPHICS:** 160X144 RESOLUTION, FOUR SHADES OF GREY, UP TO 40 SPRITES ON SCREEN SIMULTANEOUSLY

**AUDIO:** TWO SQUARE WAVE CHANNELS, ONE WAVE CHANNEL, ONE NOISE CHANNEL

**PROCESSOR:** 8-BIT SHARP LR35902 (4.19 MHZ)

**MEDIA:** ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 4MB)

**POWER:** 2XAAA BATTERIES, APPROX 10 HOURS PLAY TIME

**RAM:** 16KB

# THE HISTORY OF HERETIC

AS THE DUST SETTLED ON MARS, ID TURNED ITS ATTENTION TO A NEW MAGNIFICENT ENGINE. MEANWHILE, CAPITALISING ON THE SUCCESS OF DOOM WAS PARAMOUNT – OVER TO DUNGEONS & DRAGONS FANS, RAVEN SOFTWARE

## WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

**In 1990, the Commodore Amiga home computer remained a commercial force.** "It was the computer my brother and I were passionate about, and the one we owned," says Brian Raffel, cofounder of Raven Software. "We taught ourselves art on it, with the idea of creating a videogame." Alongside his brother, Steve, the pair from Madison, Wisconsin, formed Raven and developed the first level of *Black Crypt*. Similar to FTL Games' legendary *Dungeon Master*, *Black Crypt* saw the player commanding four heroes through the titular underground area as they sought to eliminate an evil cleric. At the time, both brothers worked in art – Brian as a high-school art teacher, Steve as a silk-screen printer. "Our focus was on creating a fully developed first level of *Black Crypt*," explains Brian. "We sent it to ten publishers in the hope of securing funding and a publishing deal." The response was positive, with the brothers accepting an offer from Electronic Arts. The Raven had taken flight.

» [PC] *Heretic*'s Ethereal Crossbow.

Meanwhile, down the road from Raven's office in Wisconsin's state capital, John Romero, John Carmack and Tom Hall were busy designing their breakthrough hit, *Wolfenstein 3D*. Having formed in Shreveport, Louisiana, their company, id Software, relocated to Madison in the early Autumn of 1991. At the suggestion of Electronic Arts, Raven advertised for a PC programmer – John Romero's girlfriend spotted the ad, pointing out the fellow software company situated just a mile down the road. "I remember when they all came to our office and showed us what they were doing [with *Wolfenstein 3D*], and they were pretty excited. Us? We were blown away," says Brian. "They had this kind of frat boy big town house, with Sam's Club delivering stacks of soda and food and – they had a fax machine! We were like, 'Wow, these guys are living the dream here!'" The companies developed mutual respect for each other's work and became friends. "John Carmack – you could tell straight away he was a genius just from the way he talked," recalls Brian. "And John Romero was a very charismatic guy." John Romero himself picks up the story. "All we had [when initially meeting Raven] was the *Commander Keen* engine. So I called up Scott Miller [of Apogee, id's

» [PC] Who knows what evil lurks around the corner in *Heretic*?

# HEXEN

» [PC] Left alone, enemies throughout the series resort to taking lumps out of each other.

publishing partner] and asked him what he thought about putting up half the money for Raven to develop a new game using the Keen engine." The offer was sent to Raven, which, despite initial excitement, preferred to continue on the Amiga, citing its superior colour display.

» [PC] Throughout the series, pressing tab brings up the game map.

***Black Crypt* became a moderate hit for Raven, while *Wolfenstein 3D* shocked the videogame world, proving a smash hit and paving the way for an even bigger gaming phenomenon.** But by the time it unleashed the Nazi-bashing first-person shooter, its developer had moved down south to Texas to escape the cold weather – just one of Wisconsin's harsh winters had been enough for id Software. But it did not forget its friends in Madison. "John Carmack was modifying the *Wolfenstein* engine, but kind of hit the wall on the extension of the technology," says John. "So we decided it wasn't the next level kind of thing we were looking for – but we'd made a better *Wolfenstein* engine that we could license." The result was Raven's *ShadowCaster*, a first-person RPG using Carmack's adapted *Wolfenstein* engine. When a small game called *Doom* appeared in 1993, the process continued, mixing id's new tech with Raven's love of *D&D* and fantasy for its next game: *Heretic*.

> "THEY HAD A FAX MACHINE!"
> BRIAN RAFFEL ON ID

The concept was simple, as John tells, "I designed it with [Raven] and was like, just give me mediaeval *Doom*!" With technical assistance from John Carmack, John Romero lent his game design skills to *Heretic* as executive producer. "We had a lot of late nights with John, and he would generate ideas or complement our own ideas," recalls ▶

## THE VIEW FROM ID

VETERAN ID SENIOR PROGRAMMER MIKE RUBITS ON HERETIC, HEXEN AND THEIR REMASTERS

■ "I've always been a big fan of Raven's games, so getting to work on *Heretic* and *Hexen* has been an unexpected but great experience. Microsoft's acquisition of Activision, which included Raven, is what opened the door – we were able to work out a deal to resolve the rights switch, with *Doom + Doom II*'s release last year providing a good base," says Mike. "I did a vast majority of the UI, having worked embedded within the Nightdive team for several years. My personal favourite change is the weapon and enemy balance changes we made to *Heretic*, which mostly came from someone in the community named Not Jabba. The modern *Doom* community has largely taken *Heretic* and *Hexen* under their wings, with some great modern episodes from *Doom* mappers. Being built on top of id tech gives it its baseline game feel that just can't be beaten. But actually, I think *Heretic* is separated from *Doom* considerably thanks to its environment, weapons and items. The *Doom* shotgun is iconic, but gibbing some poor unfortunate with a volley from the crossbow is satisfying in a different way. Then you find the Tome Of Power for the first time and realise that all your weapons have a whole different fire mode – you won't touch the pistol in *Doom* as soon as you get another weapon, but the starting wand in *Heretic* becomes very useful when powered up."

» [PC] *Hexen* introduces three distinct classes to select from.

» [PC] Ouch!

» [PC] Two years after its PC release PlayStation fans got to experience a slightly less performing *Hexen*.

Brian. "We tried a lot of new stuff." Gone was *Doom*'s famous shotgun and other ballistic weaponry, replaced with magical staffs, gauntlets and fantastical elements. Technical additions include the ability to look up and down, among other upgrades from *Doom*. "We had a programmer called Chris Rhinehart, a really smart guy," says Brian. "And all he did was move the boundary, the horizon line. Some thought it wouldn't work, but it did. So we had to include flying in the game, giving us a different edge over *Doom*, but complementing it."

> "DOOM WAS VERY SUCCESSFUL, AND WE ALL REALISED THAT FANTASY FLAIR MIGHT BE ALL THAT WE NEEDED"
> BRIAN RAFFEL

**From the moment players picked up *Heretic*'s box (whether the full or shareware version), there could be no doubt as to its theme and gameplay.** The world is in turmoil, invaded from the far east by three devilish Serpent Riders, the guardians of death everlasting. The Riders cast an insidious spell on the inhabitants, enslaving them into sheep-like obedience. Formed into a cult known as the Order Of The Sign, these poor possessed creatures scour the lands, preparing it for the domination of Rider D'Sparil. The Sidhe Elves, however, are different, blessed with a unique power that enables them to resist the brainwashing call of the Riders. Seeing the Sidhe as a threat, the Order conspires with the rulers of Earth to remove these unbelievers, these heretics, from the land. The Sidhe elders deal with the human armies, but are left powerless as the forces from the abyss wreak terrible vengeance upon them. As one of the few remaining Sidhe Elves following this massacre, the player is Corvus, standing at the gates of the City Of The Damned, ready to avenge the bloodshed of his kin and retrieve the ancient artefacts stolen by the Order.

It's a solid fantasy plot, and given the Raffels' love of *Dungeons & Dragons* (plus their experience with *Black Crypt*), it was tempting to expand *Heretic*'s remit. "I think at first we tried to be a little more aggressive thanks to our background with *D&D*," notes Brian. "We definitely wanted to be a bit deeper and richer with the RPG side. But we had a good meeting with id and decided not to reinvent the wheel. *Doom* was very successful, and we all realised that fantasy flair might be all that we needed." It was: by 1997, *PC Gamer US* was reporting sales of approximately one million copies of *Heretic* (and its sequel *Hexen*), with its reception generally positive.

# AN EPIC TALE

RETRO GAMER'S GUIDED TOUR OF THE WORLDS OF HERETIC AND HEXEN

## HERETIC

**1994**

■ The first game, spawned from John Carmack's upgraded *Doom* engine, took the design skills of John Romero and looped them with Raven's mutual love of all things *Dungeons & Dragons*. While maintaining a predilection for ranged weaponry, Raven and id laid down the template for a more mystical experience.

## HEXEN: BEYOND HERETIC

**1995**

■ Among the various engine upgrades, Raven and id further enhanced the gameplay, aware that the plethora of *Doom* clones meant it had to offer a more in-depth experience. The introduction of character classes and a hub level structure did the job, recounting another Serpent Rider tale, set in another dimension.

## HERETIC: SHADOW OF THE SERPENT RIDERS

**1996**

■ Following the success of *Heretic*, id and Raven released this bumper pack two years later, containing the original three episodes, plus two additional levels. Having defeated D'Sparil at the end of episode three, the Ossuary transports Corvus to another realm where he must scrap his way home.

## HEXEN: DEATHKINGS OF THE DARK CITADEL

**1996**

■ *Hexen*'s sole expansion appeared a year later, featuring more single-player action and six fresh multiplayer maps. Having defeated Korax, the three heroes find themselves teleported to the Realm Of The Dead and are forced to fight their way home in a plot development spookily similar to *Shadow Of The Serpent Riders*.

» [PC] Some enemies have variants, such as these Flaming Gargoyles from *Hexen*.

» [PC] In *Hexen*, the mage begins their adventure with the Sapphire Wand.

Even the middling reviews, such as inside *PC Zone*'s April 1995 issue, found room for praise, "Not as good as *Doom I* or *II*... still fun," concluded Charlie Brooker.

**H*eretic*'s success, despite competition from *Doom*-clone rivals, persuaded id and Raven to explore a sequel.** Both knew they had to bring something more to the table to set their next game apart. Released a year later, *Hexen* continues the story of the three Serpent Riders, focussing on the second, Korax, who is busy dominating another world, Hexen, in another dimension. Once more, the Serpent Rider's incredible power enslaves humanity, leaving three heroes with little choice. As either fighter Baratus, mage Daedolon or Parias the cleric, the three use Korax's mystical portal to mount an attack on its minions and, hopefully, the evil Rider itself.

Brian Raffel took on the project lead role again, while also maintaining a hand in art and design, creating the game's first level, along with numerous creatures, textures and weapons. "It was the logical step following *Heretic*'s success," continues Brian. "The biggest evolution was the introduction of character classes – that was John Romero's idea. He'd been considering it after *Heretic*, and it made sense considering the fantasy setting. It was a natural evolution." Additionally, each character has its own bespoke weaponry. "With the classes, I wanted an ultimate weapon that you're collecting [the pieces for] throughout the game," recalls John. "When it came to the cleric, I wanted a cross that

## HEXEN II
**1997**

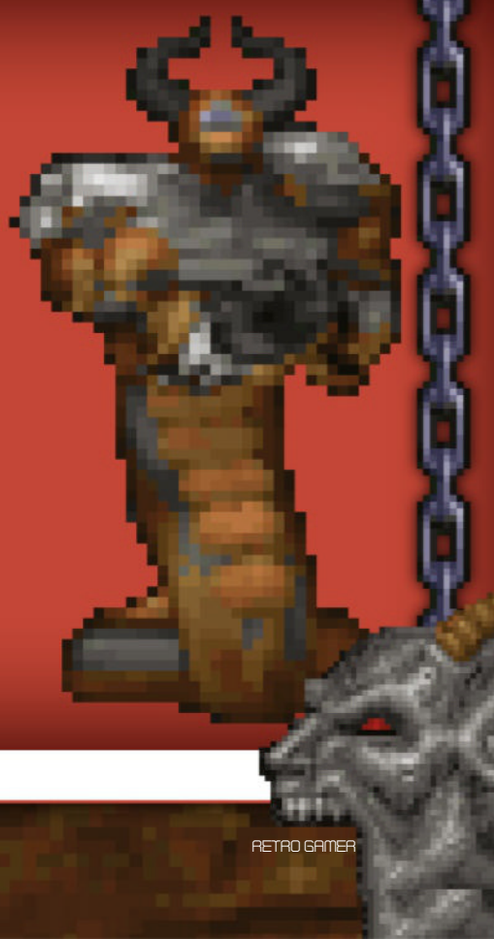
■ In the final part of the original trilogy, the player is transported to yet another dimension, this time to fight the remaining Serpent Rider, Eidolon. Alas, Eidolon has brought his four adjutants with him, making this the toughest challenge of all. Like *Hexen*, *Hexen II* boasts a hub system, and also includes more RPG tropes such as experience and levelling-up.

## HEXEN II: PORTAL OF PRAEVUS
**1998**

■ This *Hexen II* expansion again follows on from the defeat of a Shadow Rider. A nefarious wizard known as Praevus is seeking to fill the void left by the Riders and seize control of the land by harnessing their evil powers. A new player character, the Demoness, is the most significant addition alongside the fresh levels.

## HERETIC II
**1998**

■ Returning home following the events of *Heretic*, legendary Sidhe Elf Corvus finds his homeland in the thrall of a magical pestilence, its inhabitants driven insane by some mysterious curse. *Heretic II* marks a departure for the series as it ventures into third-person and diverges from the Serpent Riders storyline.



» [PC] Centaurs and Dark Bishops gang up on the player in *Hexen*.

» [PC] A hero's welcome for Corvus in *Heretic II*.

» [PC] *Heretic II*'s map loading screen.

shot out spirits that ripped through enemies. I thought it needed to be an evil black cross, and Raven made the perfect Wraithverge version."

**But it wasn't just *Hexen*'s character classes that helped it stand out.** Until 1995, the majority of first-person shooters played linearly, with players progressing from one level to the next. *Hexen* changed that, introducing a hub-based style of gameplay that encouraged exploration and introduced new avenues of problem-solving. While innovative, the style didn't quite work for everyone. "It was a completely new approach for us," says Brian. "We liked the structure [of the hub gameplay] and found it to be a cool feature, but in hindsight, we could have made it more user-friendly and intuitive for players." John Romero, still deeply involved in development, championed the hub design but also admits that it may have been too confusing, at least initially, for players. "I think the only mistake we made in *Hexen* was not looking at the first hub and deciding it should be three, not seven portals, because I think you get stuck in that first hub more than feels good for advancement. Other than that, I love everything about that game!" Elsewhere, Raven finally implemented jumping and added scripted events, which boosted the cinematic appeal of the series. Its full name reflected the progress, with everybody involved feeling that *Hexen* had evolved "beyond *Heretic*".

Released in the autumn of 1995, *Hexen* debuted at Microsoft's Halloween party/development convention Judgment Day on the 30 October. "I was there!" exclaims Brian, who oversaw the official release party for Raven's latest game. "It was an amazing experience to visit Microsoft's headquarters and attend a costume party of all things." A proud Brian and his colleagues saw *Hexen* take part in the Deathmatch '95 tournament, their new game used for the competition's final battle. Reviews were even more effusive, notably the UK's *PC Gamer* magazine, boldly claiming the Raven/id game to be "better than *Doom*!" on its front cover. Reviewer James Binns' excitement was infectious, "Yes. Yes. Yes. *Hexen* creates an utterly compelling, violent and addictive game world. I love it." Both *Heretic* and *Hexen* became solid hits, satisfying the desire from gamers for more *Doom*-related action. But technology was moving fast, and a year after *Hexen*'s release, both games were suddenly made to look extremely ancient – thanks to id.

> "I WANTED A CROSS THAT SHOT OUT SPIRITS"
> JOHN ROMERO ON THE SERIES' MADCAP WEAPONRY

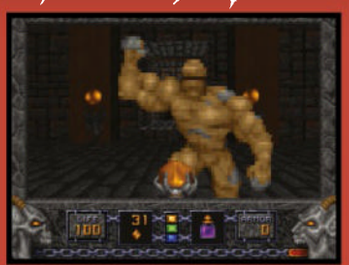
Released in 1996, *Quake*, much like its Mars-based predecessor, stunned the gaming world. Anticipation for id's latest was sky high, and it did not disappoint, unleashing a technical masterpiece inspired by Gothic fiction and featuring real-time 3D rendering. Having begun work almost immediately on a sequel to *Hexen*, everybody knew that there was no chance they'd get away with another game based on the fast-outdated *Doom* engine. Titled *Hecatomb*, the next game was intended as the final part of the *Heretic* trilogy and, as before, John Romero had plenty of ideas. "I wanted to change the player movement speed for the different classes," he remembers, "and a thief who can detect and disarm traps, and hide in shadows." The addition of levelling-up would

# THE HERETIC AND HEXEN BESTIARY

## FIRE GARGOYLE

**Heretic**

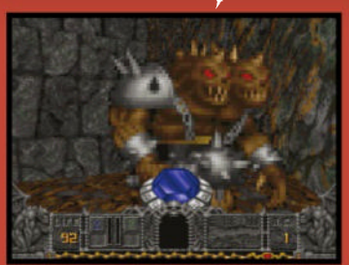
■ These flying creatures are common throughout *Heretic* and a real nuisance, especially when encountered in packs. They usually hover at range, chucking fireballs at Corvus. Should they get too close, they'll slash at the elf, making them a troublesome opponent, especially when distracted by ground-based opponents.



## GOLEM

**Heretic**

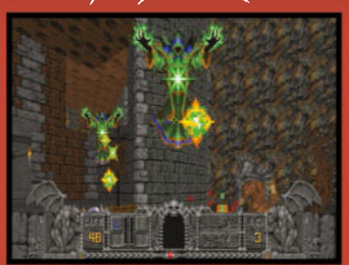
■ Like the Fire Gargoyle, the Golem is a common enemy, a human spirit trapped within a stone-like form. Golems pack a powerful punch and move deceptively quickly, making them even more dangerous adversaries in groups. Killing a Golem dramatically releases its tormented spirit from the shattered remains of its body.



## ETTIN

**Hexen**

■ The Ettin is a familiar creature from fantasy, featuring prominently in the Forgotten Realms of *Dungeons & Dragons*. These dicephalous monsters from *Hexen* were once human soldiers, transformed into Ettins by the Shadow Rider Korax. While ponderous, their maces can hurt, and they have a decent HP count.



## DARK BISHOP

**Hexen**

■ Attacking in the floating formation of an evil coven, these necromancers love to gang up on recklessly brave adventurers, often in conjunction with ground-based monsters. They hurl a load of fireballs while fading in and out of sight, making them tricky and visually impressive opponents to do battle with.

» [PC] The power-hungry Praevus hatches his despicable plan in the *Hexen II* expansion, *Portal Of Praevus*.

improve these skills passively, building the player into a supreme character by the latter stages of the game. Taking place in a ruined castle, *Hecatomb*'s chief nemesis, a Lich King, lurks in the catacombs, a giant dragon guarding the entrance. Notes John, "It was more like a giant hub, with smaller hubs outside of it, the player going out from the dungeon to different biomes, but not as many as you did in *Hexen*." Development began, then John Romero left id, and Activision acquired Raven. The publisher inevitably reasoned, given its commercial leanings, that there were two different IPs in *Heretic* and *Hexen*, requesting specific sequels for each from Raven. *Hecatomb* was no more; *Hexen II* was born.

**Having dispatched the Serpent Riders D'Sparil (in *Heretic*) and Korax (in *Hexen*), in *Hexen II* the player faces off against the third, and most powerful of these evil beings: Eidolon.** Set on Thyrion, another world enslaved by the Riders, there are now four character classes to choose from as the player takes on Eidolon's quartet of generals, each bossing their own continent on Thyrion. Defeat them all and you get a crack at Eidolon itself. "Switching to the *Quake* engine

» [PC] Going toe to trotter with Pestilience in *Hexen II*.

» [PC] Facing off against the supreme Dragon Rider Eidolon in *Hexen II*.

» [PC] Spiders. Why'd it have to be spiders?

## RETRO GAMER'S FAVOURITE SEVEN BEASTIES FROM HERETIC AND HEXEN

### SERAPH OVERLORD

**Heretic II**

■ These ugly and muscular slavers watch over the innocent citizens of Parthoris as they work in the mines, torturing and killing anybody they feel is not working hard enough. Tough and hefty, they can cause serious damage to Corvus with their swinging axes – best to crack out the bow and arrow.

### WEREDRAGON

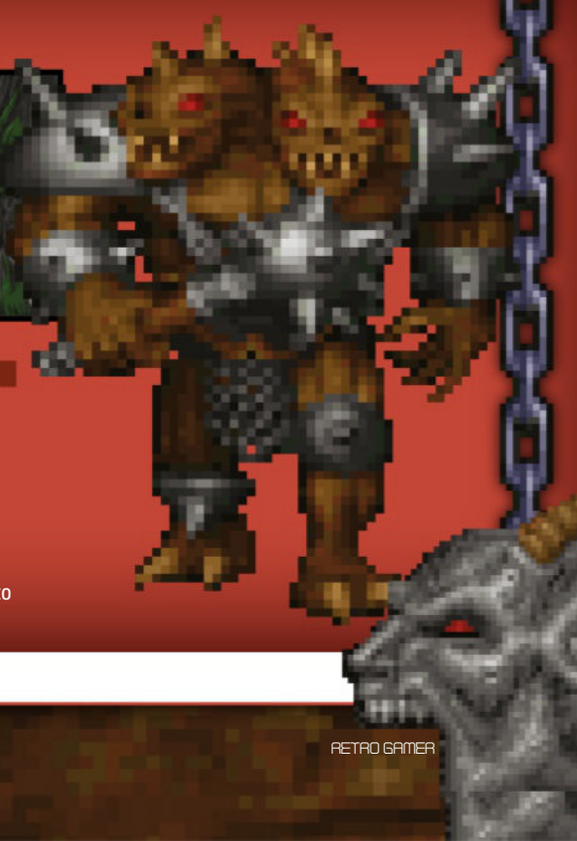
**Heretic**

■ Fast, well-armoured and powerful, the Weredragon is best avoided in closed spaces. Their fireballs can do up to 32 points of damage, and these monsters take a lot of hits to put down. Most impressive is their evil cackle and smile as they bear down on the player, although it's not a view to cherish.

### CHICKEN

**Heretic**

■ The formidable poultry appears typically when the player hurls a Morph Ovum at an enemy in *Heretic*. Don't let its small size lure you into a false sense of security: given a couple of hours, this fearless fowl could easily peck Corvus to death. Maybe.



# HERETIC AND HEXEN RISE - AGAIN

NIGHTDIVE'S STEPHEN KICK ON ITS HERETIC AND HEXEN REMASTERS.

**How and why did Nightdive choose these games for its latest remasters?**
The project came about as a result of the trust and momentum we've built up with Bethesda through our previous collaborations. After bringing *Doom*, *Quake* and more to modern platforms, the next logical step was to dive into another beloved chapter of id Software's history, one shaped by Raven Software's dark fantasy vision.

**Do you have any fond memories of playing these games?**
One moment that's always stayed with me is when I first got my hands on the Phoenix Rod in *Heretic*. Suddenly, you're wielding this devastating staff that spews fire like a mythical flamethrower. And then with *Hexen*, the realisation that the levels weren't linear stages but interconnected hubs, completely changing the way I approached the game. That kind of design was ahead of its time, and still feels innovative today. The character classes added another layer entirely, fundamentally changing your approach to combat.

**Did redeveloping these games present any unique challenges?**
I'd say the greatest challenge was revisiting the maps and making improvements based on legacy feedback from both players and the journalists who originally reviewed the games in the Nineties. The updates the team has made are substantial – including a way-point system in the automap to help guide the player, something new players will be especially grateful for!

**Are there any new levels?**
There's a new *Heretic* episode, Faith Renewed, that includes all-new textures and even a pair of new enemies, the Draugr and the Troll. Both are based on unused Raven concept art that we uncovered from the archives.

**What has it been like working with id Software?**
Nothing short of incredible – they've been genuinely collaborative every step of the way, open, supportive and deeply respectful of both the original games and the work we're doing to preserve and modernise them. There's a real sense of shared purpose: they understand the legacy of titles such as *Heretic* and *Hexen*, and they're just as excited as we are to see that legacy carried forward.

**What's next for Nightdive?**
We have a few more surprises planned before the end of the year, but that's all I can say!

---

Our thanks to Stephen for his time. *Heretic + Hexen* is now available on Xbox Series S/X (also on Game Pass), PC, PlayStation 5, PlayStation 4, and Nintendo Switch.

was certainly not easy at first," grimaces Brian, "especially compared to working with the *Doom* engine, which we were more familiar with. [id] were relentless innovators in 3D engines, gameplay mechanics and multiplayer technology. Each time id Software released a game, they set the industry standard, and *Quake* was no exception."

**Brian Raffel remained the project lead on *Hexen II*.** "One of the most exciting aspects of *Hexen II* was working with fully realised 3D creatures for the first time – it added a new layer of immersion," he says. Moreover, Raven added more RPG elements and mechanics, most notably the facility to build experience, increasing the player character's strength and magical ability as they progress through the game – not quite as expansive as John Romero's ideas, but progress nonetheless. The hub design was still present, albeit similar to its predecessor, and, again, this was criticised in some quarters. "At the time we believed players were looking for greater challenges," explains Brian. "However, in retrospect, there were areas we pushed things too far, making progression more difficult than necessary." Finally, a new multiplayer mode replaced the standard deathmatch with a castle siege environment. "We were incredibly proud of [Siege]," smiles Brian. "There was so much depth and potential in that mode, and looking back, I wish we had pushed it even further. We considered turning it into a standalone game at one point – it was one of those ideas that could have evolved into something much bigger."

» It's safe to say UK's *PC Gamer* magazine loved *Hexen*.

» [PC] I'll pass on the BBQ, thanks lads.

**The final *Heretic* game, *Heretic II*, was released in 1998, utilising a modified engine from *Quake II*.** Sidhe Elf Corvus, having defeated D'Sparil (in the original *Heretic*), is transported to another dimension by the Ossuary and fights his way back to his home of Parthoris at the start of the game. But things are not as they should be – the population is ravaged and driven mad by disease. Infected while travelling through his hometown of Silverspring, Corvus resolves to find a cure while locating the source of the terrible pestilence. *Heretic II*'s third-person perspective (possibly inspired by the success of the *Tomb Raider* and *Resident Evil* games) alienated some fans. However, with much of the Raven team remaining in place, including more brilliant audio design from Kevin Schilder and another stunning cover by Gerald Brum, *Heretic II* garnered decent reviews, if poor sales, consigning the series to history, until now.

Today, Raven has the honour of continuing the worldwide success of the *Call Of Duty* franchise. But it all started with these quirky fantasy games that refined the nascent first-person shooter genre. "I think one of the luckiest things that ever happened to us was meeting id at the right time and the right way," recalls Brian. "We earned our opportunity with our hard work and that relationship, and I feel honoured we were a big part of that." Since the heady days at the start of the first-person revolution, Raven has been at the forefront, developing games such as *Soldier Of Fortune* and, today, as a part of the *Call Of Duty* franchise. "Just being creative takes you to a lot of places – but to be at the birth of the early Nineties with id, and to be associated with them, was probably some of the best moments of my life, and certainly my professional career." For id, *Heretic* was a way of controlling *Doom* mania while generating revenue from its ground-breaking technology. "It took other companies more time to come out with their own thing, so *Heretic* stood out – everyone was starved for something that felt as solid as the *Doom* engine," recalls John. "Both *Heretic* and *Hexen* did really well – we were really happy with those guys. They were a great team, and the entire company was exceptional. It was perfect for those games." ✱

> "BOTH HERETIC AND HEXEN DID REALLY WELL"
> JOHN ROMERO

**Our thanks to John Romero and Brian Raffel for their time.**

## THE REFRIGERATOR STORY

### "YOU GUYS DON'T HAVE A FRIDGE?"

■ When Raven met id, the differences between the two companies were stark, and none more so than in the plainness of Raven's offices. "They were in a smallish office and there was nothing in there," recalls John Romero. "I don't think they even had a desk for a secretary or office manager." While hanging out at Raven late one night, the id designer inquired about where the fridge was. "And they're like, no, we don't have anything like that. So I asked what they had to drink, and they said there was a water fountain outside the front door. I said, 'No way!'" The following day, John went to Sears, bought his new dev friends a "big old refrigerator" and escorted it back to Raven's offices. "I said, 'Now go fill it up, pack it full of drinks. This is how you dev, you gotta have drinks and snacks!'"

# Virtual Boy Wario Land

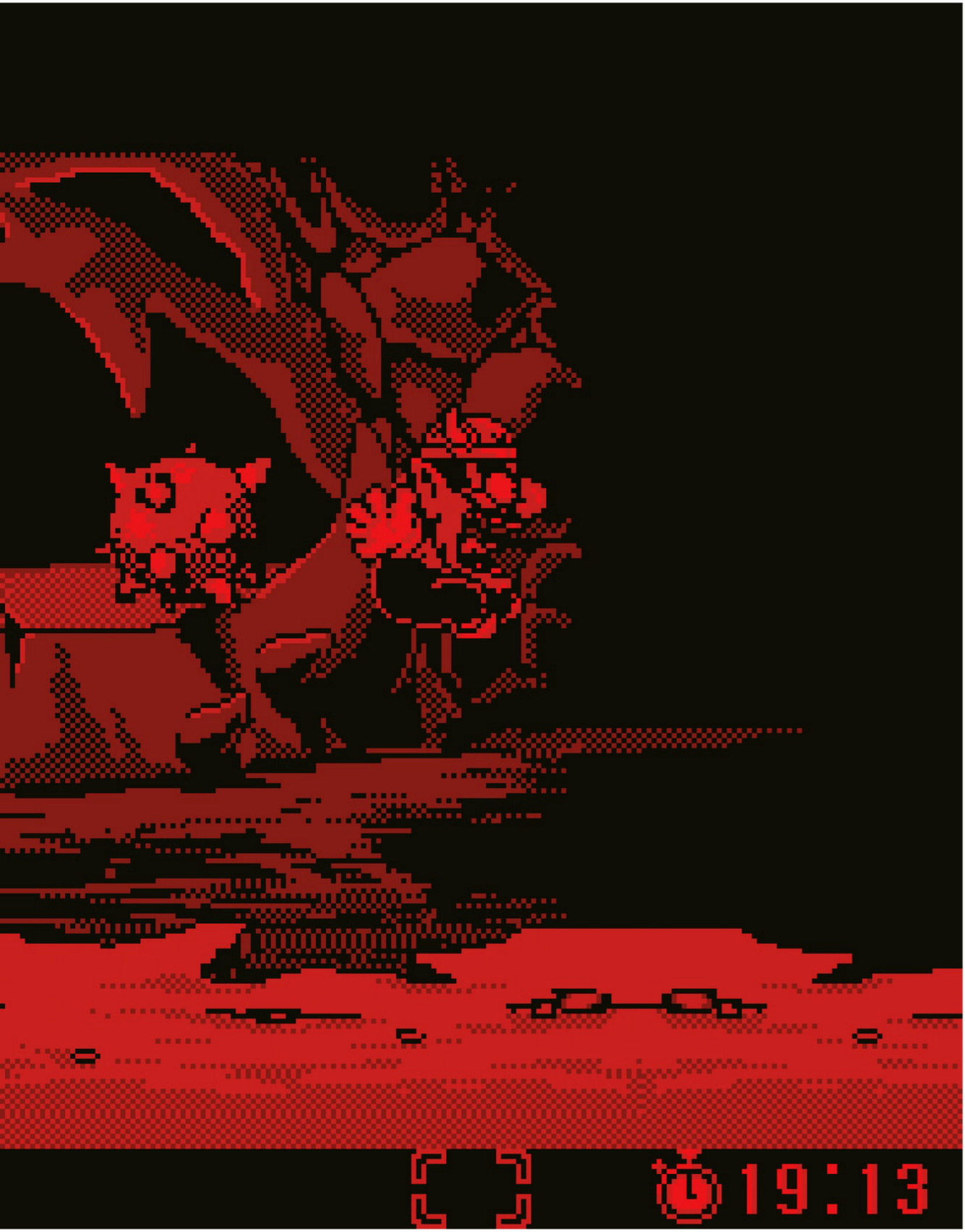
CAVE STORY

» VIRTUAL BOY » 1995 » NINTENDO R&D1

**If there's anything that makes me doubt a person's opinion on games, it's claiming that a particular system doesn't have any good games.** Even systems that failed in the marketplace often have at least a couple of games that are worth a look, but my nonsense detector really spiked when I first heard that the Virtual Boy is bereft of worthwhile software. It may lack a big *Mario* or *Zelda*, but surely there has to be at least some Nintendo magic? Unsurprisingly, there is – and *Virtual Boy Wario Land* definitely has it.

In this game, the troublesome treasure obsessive happens upon a cave filled with goodies and must make his way out while grabbing as much loot as possible. It's a platform game that shows real consideration for the hardware that houses it – the cave setting ensures plenty of dark scenes to limit eye strain, and both regular enemies and bosses often utilise sprite scaling, highlighting the simulated depth of the Virtual Boy's stereoscopic display. Another key feature that does this is the pads that launch Wario into the background areas of stages for further exploration, a gimmick *Donkey Kong Country Returns* reprised years later. You'll want to explore those areas because they often contain extra coins, and hidden doorways that lead to the ten major treasures you're looking for.

Naturally, solid game design fundamentals underpin the gimmicks. Finding those hidden doorways typically requires use of special abilities, including an eagle hat that lets Wario fly and a dragon hat that acts as a flamethrower. The game ranks you on how many treasures and coins you find, as well as your completion time, making for a game that's a little short but designed for replay value – and with well-designed and varied stages, you'll definitely want to return. When a system actively encourages you to limit the length of your play sessions like the Virtual Boy does, that's exactly the kind of design you'd hope to see.


19:13

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**HERC'S ADVENTURES**

**PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION, SATURN

**RELEASED:** 1997

**THE SIMPSONS WRESTLING (PICTURED)**

**PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION

**RELEASED:** 2001

**MTV CELEBRITY DEATHMATCH**

**PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 2

**RELEASED:** 2003

## IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** LUCASARTS
- **DEVELOPER:** BIG APE PRODUCTIONS
- **PLATFORM:** PC, PLAYSTATION
- **RELEASED:** 1999
- **GENRE:** ACTION/ ADVENTURE

THE MAKING OF

# STAR WARS EPISODE I THE PHANTOM MENACE

# THE FIRST PREQUEL FILM REMAINS A MIXED BAG: THERE'S THE POD RACE AND DUEL OF THE FATES, BUT IT ALSO INTRODUCES JAR JAR BINKS. SO HOW DOES THE OFFICIAL GAME FOR THE FILM COMPARE?

**WORDS BY PAUL KAUTZ**

**The end of the Nineties was a difficult time for LucasArts: the company, which had created some of the most-beloved point-and-click adventures of all time, almost completely turned its back on the genre.** The reason for this was the May 1999 release of *Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace*, the first new *Star Wars* film since 1983's *Return Of The Jedi*. For LucasArts, this meant that the prestigious but not particularly successful adventure games would be a thing of the past – the company was transformed from a tailor shop for cult adventures to an assembly line for *Star Wars* games.

Ironically, the official game for the prequel was not developed in-house, but by Big Ape Productions, a small development studio founded in 1995 by LucasArts veterans Dean Sharpe and Mike Ebert. Shortly after the release of the studio's debut title *Herc's Adventures* in 1997, it was commissioned by LucasArts to develop *The Phantom Menace*. Sounds like a dream, and in some aspects it was – but it also brought with it a lot of difficulties, as Mike tells us, "From a design standpoint we had a lot of issues. We started building with very limited tools. I remember one of our designers plotting out background art on graph paper, because we had no way to import 3D art into the level-building tool. We could not make the game first-person action, as we could not compete with the *Jedi Knight* game being developed at that time. We also had to make the game run in software rendering at first because LucasArts did not want to commit to a dedicated 3D graphics card being required. We were also targeting PS2 development later on, but when the PS2 was delayed we had to make the game run on a PS1, which was a nightmare."

> "WE HAD TO MAKE THE GAME RUN ON A PS1, WHICH WAS A NIGHTMARE"
> **MIKE EBERT**

Much more problematic, however, was the fact that the development team received very little information about the film itself and therefore often had to simply guess, especially in the area of level design, as Mike recalls. "It was really hard to get an understanding of the movie, since most everything we saw was blue screen shots. We had an early script, but I remember having almost no idea what much of the movie looked like until very near the completion of the game. We had a lot of pictures of doors, windows and hallways, but no description of how they were being used. The very first level is the Trade Federation ship, and we saw almost nothing of how it looks in the film until we were done with the game. I remember animating the door of that ship, just trying to guess how it might open and close, based on one photo. So a lot of times we just went with assumptions about the story – sometimes we were right, and sometimes we were wrong."

However, according to Mike, the team had a surprising amount of design freedom, "We

» [PC] As in the film, Darth Maul is also the final boss in the game. Only he's much easier to defeat here.

» [PC] The graphics of the game are very simple, but the explosions in particular look rather nice.

» [PlayStation] Some key scenes from the film are significantly expanded in the game. For example, you get to meet Jabba The Hutt.

## MAY THESE FOUR BE WITH YOU
THE HEROES YOU PLAY IN THE GAME

### OBI-WAN KENOBI

■ You spend the majority of the adventure with Obi-Wan Kenobi – five of the game's eleven levels feature him exclusively. He is the classic all-rounder, as a typical Jedi he always has his lightsaber with him, can double-jump and shove enemies away using the Force Push.

### QUI-GON JINN

■ Obi-Wan's master is used in three levels, but you only really notice this because of the different 3D model – the Jedi don't differ from each other in terms of play. Qui-Gon is very skillful with his lightsaber and Force Push, and is supposedly the better diplomat.

### QUEEN AMIDALA

■ Padmé Amidala is at the centre of two levels and is particularly good at knocking out enemy droids with her Droid Stunner as well as zapping around with her laser pistol. Otherwise she is accompanied by her bodyguards who do most of the fighting for her.

### CAPTAIN PANAKA

■ Quarsh Panaka is Queen Amidala's head of security. His appearance in the game is limited to just one level, in which his main task is to get tickets for a tour of Coruscant City. Mike Ebert on his inclusion, "I think we gave Captain Panaka a much bigger role than he had in the film."

could pretty much go where we wanted too with the game. No one ever said, 'You can't do that!' There was very little oversight on what we did. They needed the game done before the movie, and we had to just make stuff as fast as we could, with the limited information we had."

> "I SEE SO MUCH MISSED POTENTIAL IN THE GAME"
> **MIKE EBERT**

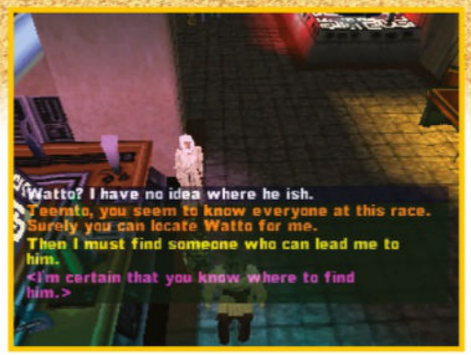
The only non-negotiable limit was the release date: the film hit American cinemas on 19 May 1999 (three days after its premiere), and the game had to be in the shops by then. Which, of course, meant that many ideas had to be cut, as Mike recalls. "Internally we had a first-person mode we played around with, and a network PVP mode. Unfortunately there was little interest from LucasArts in having either of those options in the game. Meeting the deadline to launch with the movie was the primary desire. If the game had been on a longer development cycle I think we could have made it network co-op with PVP too."

All the cuts ultimately ensured that the goal was achieved. The PC version of the game was released in the USA at the same time as the film, with the UK version following just under a month later – and therefore a month before the premiere here (14 July 1999). The game therefore gave players a full month to spoil themselves with the plot of the film. The PlayStation version followed in September 1999.

**The original announcement of the game was made under the name *Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Adventure,* before the name of the film was adopted.** It roughly follows the plot of the film, taking a handful of key scenes from it and dragging them out, up until the grand finale against Darth Maul. However, as *The Adventure* was only one of several official games for the film, Big Ape Productions simply had to leave out many scenes so as not to compete with the other products. This meant, for example, the pod race, one of the central scenes of the film, only takes place in the form of a cutscene showing some spectators, while the pods are only seen very briefly. Which is ironic, as Mike recalls, "About the only thing we saw much of was the pod race scene. Unfortunately we had to avoid that, because there was a dedicated pod race game in the works by a different development team." More on this in The Fandom Menace panel.

» [PC] Most of the locations will be instantly familiar to fans of the film.

» [PlayStation] In most conversations you have several possible answers.




» [PlayStation] As a Jedi, you can manipulate some conversations in your favour (marked in pink)

The game's 11 levels are based on film locations such as the Trade Federation ship, Otoh Gunga, Tatooine, Coruscant and Theed. Most of the time you play the Jedi Obi-Wan Kenobi or Qui-Gon Jinn, but Queen Amidala and Captain Panaka also come into play – more on them in the May These Four Be With You panel. Originally, Mace Windu was also planned as a playable character, but had to be cut.

There are NPCs everywhere with whom you can interact and have multiple-choice conversations. In the case of the Jedi, you occasionally even have the option of using a Jedi mind trick to make life a little easier for yourself. Apart from that, a large part of the game

## THE FANDOM MENACE

MORE GAMES SET DURING EPISODE 1

### STAR WARS EPISODE I: RACER

**Nintendo 64, Various, 1999**

■ The pod race is probably one of the most famous and exciting scenes from *Episode 1*. So it's no wonder that these ten minutes got their own game, which is considered one of the best in the *Episode 1* canon: the wonderfully frantic races are still a lot of fun today!

### STAR WARS: PIT DROIDS

**PC, 1999**

■ Even the Pit Droids got their own game, which turns out to be a *Lemmings* variant: the droids move blindly forwards, the player has to show them the way to the next world using various arrows. It's surprisingly entertaining, with a whopping 300 levels and a groovy soundtrack.

### STAR WARS EPISODE I: JEDI POWER BATTLES

**PlayStation, Dreamcast, GBA, 2000**

■ As one of five Jedi, you run and jump through an extensive mixture of platformer and lightsaber-based beat-'em-up. The mission design is interesting, the action is solid, Darth Maul is a great final boss – and you can play co-operatively with a friend.

» [PC] Characters look extremely rough and lack any detail, especially in close-up views.

» [PC] Every now and then you can operate stationary guns to get rid of enemies faster.

» [PC] The two Jedi can not only slice enemies with their lightsabers, but also reflect their shots back to them.

consists of completing fetch quests for NPCs, which for example greatly drags out Qui-Gon's search for ship parts on Tatooine. Every now and then you also have to "Solve dozens of challenging puzzles" (according to the ads at the time) – which is shorthand for pressing switches (occasionally using the Force from a distance), finding keys or moving crates.

And of course there is also fighting. The Jedi have their lightsabers, but everyone can also use some kind of bazooka, blaster or Thermal Detonator. There are also stationary guns in the area from time to time, waiting to be used against droids of various sizes or Sand People. Due to bugs, it is also possible to behave very un-Jedi-like and simply mow down a large part of the civilian population in the game – this won't push you to the dark side of the Force, but you will get more standard enemies thrown at you as punishment. The battles are very simple, which basically degrades the lightsabers in particular to glowing baseball bats.

Technically, the game was not a pretty sight, even by end-Nineties standards, with its low-poly characters and the lack of variety in the levels, which are shown from a slightly slanted bird's eye view. But the graphics served their purpose, and according to Mike, the 3D system was quite cleverly designed, "We did use a unique 3D-based tile system, that worked a lot like a traditional tile system in 2D games, you could easily swap out tiles on the map with a simple ID change. This allowed us to make some huge levels out of these building block tiles. I actually wished we'd been able to develop that engine more, it could have had some interesting game potential."

**On the acoustic side, the game truly shines through the use of the spectacular original soundtrack by John Williams – the PlayStation version even includes the official video for *Duel Of The Fates* as a bonus in its main menu.** In addition, Jake Lloyd (Anakin Skywalker), Ahmed Best (Jar Jar Binks) and Andy Secombe (Watto) lend their voices to their respective game characters, which gives the game an extra touch of authenticity. Nevertheless, it was anything but well received by the gaming press at the time. The 78% in *PC Zone* is on the higher end of the ratings.

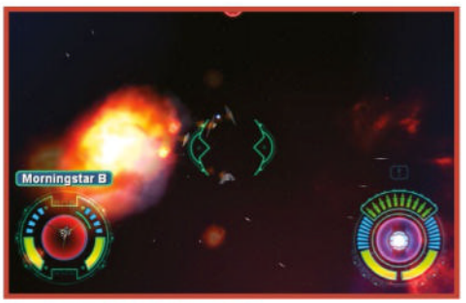
Otherwise there were, for example, 5/10 points in *Edge* and 1/5 stars in the 213th issue of *CVG*, which showed no mercy and called the game, "A nightmare from start to finish."

And even Mike has difficulty finding praise for his game in retrospect. "I played about half the game on a PC a couple of years ago. I actually really don't like it much, because I see so much missed potential to make a much better product. I felt like a lot of quality was sacrificed to hit deadlines on the game – and on the film. We met a lot of the 'hands-on people' in the trenches making the film. A lot of them were uncomfortable with some of the decisions made there, things like Midi-chlorians, Jar Jar Binks, the miraculous conception comment about Anakin. Repeatedly, as people told us these things, they would follow it with, 'Don't worry, that will be changed in editing.' Then the film came out… and nothing had changed! It was that group knowledge that the film was going to be awkward, but little desire to change it, that soured me to the Lucas magic. The universe was really great fun to work with. It's just unfortunate we had to work fairly blind on this particular game." ✱

## STAR WARS EPISODE 1: BATTLE FOR NABOO

**Nintendo 64, PC, 2000**

■ Aboard various land, air and water-based vehicles, you spend 15 missions on and around Naboo. The game is quite reminiscent of *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* – which comes as no surprise, as *Battle For Naboo* was also developed by Factor 5.




## STAR WARS: STARFIGHTER

**PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC, 2001**

■ *Starfighter* was released almost two years after *Episode 1*, and put players in the cockpits of various flying machines from the film to fight the evil Trade Federation. In the role of three different pilots, you let the lasers do the talking for 14 missions.

## STAR WARS: SUPER BOMBAD RACING

**PlayStation 2, 2001**

■ Who hasn't always dreamed of driving around with kawaii-style overdrawn characters like Jar Jar Binks, Boss Nass, Sebulba or Queen Amidala? *Super Bombad Racing* could also be called *Super Star Wars Kart*, because that's exactly what it is: simple, kid-friendly races.

» [Dreamcast] Races in *MSR* take place on the city streets of Tokyo, San Francisco and London.

Instructions
ROADSTER
CHALLENGE
You have to beat a lap time of 0:33.0 minutes. You are given an infinite amount of laps to try to beat the time
CONTINUE
- BACK

» [Dreamcast] Cars and races are unlocked via Kudos points, achieved through challenges and stylish driving.

» [Dreamcast] The time in which races take place is linked to the internal clock of the Dreamcast.

## IN THE KNOW

- **DEVELOPER:** BIZARRE CREATIONS
- **COMPOSER:** RICHARD JACQUES
- **BEST TRACK:** AM I ONLY DREAMING
- **RELEASE:** 2000
- **PLATFORM:** DREAMCAST
- **GENRE:** RACING

# MSR
# METROPOLIS STREET RACER

BIZARRE CREATIONS' RACING GAME LAUNCHED IN THE YEAR 2000 WITH A SOUNDTRACK OF FLAVOURFUL RADIO STATIONS, ROARING ENGINES AND PHENOMENAL MUSIC. WE TALK WITH COMPOSER RICHARD JACQUES ABOUT HOW HE BROUGHT THE SOUNDS OF THE CITY TO LIFE

WORDS BY JAMES TOCCHIO

**Much could be written about the many ways that *Metropolis Street Racer* innovated the well-travelled roads of the racing genre.** Its Kudos System tied progression as much to how stylishly you drove as it did to rankings and lap times. Its photo-realistic texture-mapping of real-world city streets predated Google Street View by seven years. Its dynamic day/night cycle worked with the Dreamcast's internal clock so that races in any of the game's three real-world cities would take place at the actual time in those cities.

The sum of these (and many other) new design ideas imbued *MSR* with a feeling that's rarely felt in a racing game: that its streets were alive. This sense of life was also baked into the game's incredible soundtrack. Each of *MSR*'s three cities, London, San Francisco and Tokyo, featured unique radio stations populated by local DJs, real-life radio advertisements and a selection of region-specific songs which beautifully matched the vibe of each locale.

*MSR*'s soundtrack wasn't just music. It was world-building through audio. "I was still in-house at Sega Europe in London," recalls Richard Jacques, *MSR*'s composer. "They said they'd just signed this new game with Bizarre Creations, an exclusive being made for Sega Europe, so I knew that I had to do all the music, sound design, including the car sounds, all the dialogue, DJ scripts, basically anything you hear in that game. It was a huge amount of work."

> "I FIND IT VERY HUMBLING THAT THERE'S A WHOLE NEW GENERATION OF FANS THAT WEREN'T YET BORN WHEN I WAS WRITING THEM"
> RICHARD JACQUES

As it turns out, Rockstar's *GTA* sequel started off as an early starting point for *MSR*'s musical direction. "I must give credit to *Grand Theft Auto 2*, which was a fantastically fun game which had a great radio station system," says Richard. "However, we wanted to do something more realistic, so I was looking at the popular styles of music in those territories and the kind of radio stations that would play them. This radio station is going to be jazz. This one's going to be R&B. This is going to be EDM. And I wanted to give the player freedom to make their own playlists of their favourite tracks which they could save on the VMU [the Dreamcast's innovative memory card]."

Each radio station and the songs which they broadcast are carefully considered to capture a specific regional flavour. Take *Sold Out* for example, the prog-rock inflected optimism-rush which Richard says was a nod to the band Genesis. "That's a play on words of one of my favourite bands, a cross between the album titles *Selling England By The Pound* and *Seconds Out* by Genesis, and that song was inspired by *Turn It On Again* which is a great song with a very strange time signature. Their chord changes have this huge lift, and that was something I was consciously trying to do with [*Sold Out*]."

Meanwhile, one of San Francisco's stations features songs like *Long, Long Road*, a tongue-in-cheek country-music ballad with a catchy tune and silly lyrics about a man and woman who go shopping for underwear and end up getting married. "I was having gentle fun with that one," Richard laughs. "Because there's a certain element of humour that country artists put in when they're doing a song like that. I didn't want it to be too serious."

There's even a pastiche of Will Smith a la *Big Willie Style*, songs reminiscent of Oasis' debut album, and a pastiche of Prodigy's techno hits from the Nineties. On the more sophisticated end of the scale, Tokyo's jazz stations serve

» [Dreamcast] Drifting plays a massive role in progression, since it's one of the best ways to earn Kudos points.

» Hear Richard's work in *Metropolis Street Racer, Sonic R, Jet Set Radio, Mass Effect, 007: Bloodstone, LittleBigPlanet* and *Guardians Of The Galaxy.*

up a helping of silky horn and piano tunes. The moody bass thrumming and keyboard tickling of *Low Lights* and *Tokyo Bonus Track* might feel just as fitting in the middle of an 80mph drift as when lounging in a dimly lit hotel bar, favourite drink in hand.

***MSR*'s vocal tracks add yet another layer of personality, with the best of them coming from TJ Davis, who Richard had previously worked with on *Sonic R*.** "I wanted to get her involved," says Richard when asked about TJ Davis' contributions to the album. "She's got a great rock voice, and a great pop voice as well. We weren't allowed to use her real name, so she went under the name Helena Davidson. She did some of the dance stuff, one of the jazz funk tracks and some pop, because she's very good at changing her voice to suit the style. She can have a younger, whispery voice and then she can really belt out rock numbers as well."

This rich musical tapestry needed the backing roar of real engines, so Richard spent weeks in a semi-anechoic chamber, recording the throb of exhaust, the whine of turbos and the raucous explosions of rotary engines. "We recorded 30 cars one at a time, and had eight microphones surrounding them, a binaural head in the car, and two microphones at the exhaust," Richard recalls.

All told, *MSR*'s sound production took almost 16 months. Twenty-five years later, the music still resonates. "I recently watched a YouTube video in which a young lady listened to the songs for the first time." Richard says. "I find it very humbling that there's a whole new generation of fans that weren't yet born when I was writing them. I'd love to remix some of the tracks and it'd be interesting to see if people would want a vinyl or CD release. I'm just grateful to people for listening. It always puts a smile on my face." ✱

» [Dreamcast] The cities in the game were chosen because that's where Sega's headquarters can be found.

» In the semi-anechoic chamber, Richard captured the sounds of over 30 different cars featured in *MSR*. Sega Europe producer Kats Sato is shown here in the driver's seat.

## BEYOND THE MUSIC

### How Metropolis Street Racer upped its realism by adding radio ads

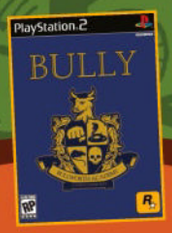
■ In addition to creating all the songs in the game, recording the car sounds, and writing the scripts for the radio stations' many DJs, Richard also dreamed up the idea of featuring a user-adjustable car stereo and real-world radio ads for the player to listen to.

The car stereo was provided through a partnership with Kenwood. In the game's option menu, players can directly control the deck, switch CDs and stations, and even create personalised mixes of favourite songs. How many games let you 'burn' your own CD?

Real-world radio ads were provided by various brands, lending a sense of place and time. Between songs you might hear an ad for a local sports pub, or a travel guide.

"To my knowledge," Richard tells us, "this had never been done before. But I figured that'd be cool, if while you're racing along, you're hearing all these quirky voiceovers, and it added to the realism of feeling like you're in those cities."

# THE MAKING OF BULLY




## IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ROCKSTAR GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** ROCKSTAR VANCOUVER
- **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 2
- **RELEASED:** 2006
- **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE

**ORIGINALLY RELEASED AS CANIS CANEM EDIT, BULLY TELLS A STORY OF AUTHORITY, ORDER AND DEFIANCE. BEHIND THE SCENES, SIMILAR TENSIONS WERE PLAYING OUT BETWEEN THE INTENSELY DEMANDING ROCKSTAR GAMES HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK AND THEIR OVERWORKED DEVELOPMENT TEAM IN VANCOUVER, WHO WERE PUSHED TO BREAKING POINT**

**WORDS BY SEAN COLE**

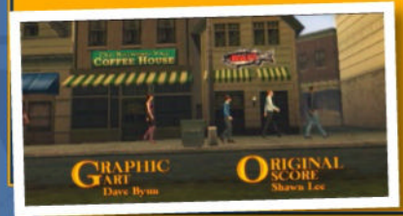
» [PlayStation 2] Attacking jocks with a baseball bat outside the gym.

# COMPOSING A CLASSIC

## HOW SHAWN LEE CREATED BULLY'S HAUNTINGLY INFECTIOUS THEME MUSIC

■ Despite being so memorable, *Bully*'s theme wasn't made in a traditional way. "That was in the first batch of tracks," Shawn tells us. "I said, 'Look, I'm not going to sit down and try to write the main theme. It's a fool's game. It's going to kick you in the face.' In the process of making music, I felt like the main theme would make itself known. You need something that's catchy that people will remember."

Numerous flights around the world slowly led Shawn to the now-iconic tune. "I met Rockstar in New York, then I went back to London. A couple of days later, I flew out to Tokyo to do some gigs. While I was out there, I was starting to conceptualise all of the information. I was thinking about strategies and instruments. It was almost like creating a cast of characters." After wandering Japan, a chance store encounter led to one of *Bully*'s main instruments. "I had a day off right before I came home. I went into a department store in the Shibuya district and they had this Kawai toy piano, which sounded really nice," Shawn recalls. "I just thought, 'This instrument is going to be one of the most important voices in this soundtrack.' It had something magical, and I was going to use that in conjunction with the glockenspiel. They had a similar timbre. It reminds you of childhood. It has a magical, eerie sound to it. It's quite naïve and childlike but also has a slight creepiness. That juxtaposition was helpful."




"We knew that a lot of the experiences really came from Dan Houser's own childhood. He was projecting himself into the story, but everybody's gone through school and those social cliques and stereotypes. It touched on all our childhood memories."

Jimmy Hopkins is the spiky 15-year-old protagonist of *Bully*. Like Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher In The Rye*, he's a cynical and disillusioned outsider. Rebellious yet fundamentally good-natured, he distrusts authority. After being expelled from various schools, Jimmy ends up at Bullworth Academy, a strict and old-fashioned institution presided over by Dr Ralph Crabblesnitch, where reputation is everything. *Bully* starts with a cutscene. Jimmy is being dropped off at the boarding school by his distracted mother and her new husband before they go on a year-long honeymoon cruise, leaving him trapped. Bullworth's ominous motto (Canis Canem Edit, Latin for 'dog eat dog') and crest – featuring a rat, a skull, a snake and a fist – signal that a fight for survival awaits. ▶

**SHAWN LEE**

■ Musician Shawn Lee composed *Bully*'s score. He's busy working in his studio and touring with his group Young Gun Silver Fox.

## DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

**CATACLYSM**
**PLATFORM:** PC
**RELEASED:** 2000

**GLOBAL OPERATIONS (PICTURED)**
**PLATFORM:** PC
**RELEASED:** 2002

**TREASURE PLANET: BATTLE AT PROCYON**
**PLATFORM:** PC
**RELEASED:** 2002

**Throughout Rockstar Games' rise to prominence, it played by its own rules, for better or worse.** Unapologetically brash and ambitious, its cavalier attitude towards established conventions helped to reinvent the possibilities of gaming and turn it into a major cultural force. But Rockstar's pursuit of greatness often involved a gruelling workload that caused upset too. The creation of *Bully* was no exception.

"The memories of it are love-hate. It was a fun, weird, hellish, chaotic, awesome time," says Andrew Wood, one of just two environment artists at Rockstar Vancouver who stayed to see the game through to completion. "I reflect back fondly on the people and the times and the crazy things we did after hours, but then I think about the stress!"

Multiple people involved in making *Bully* were asked to discuss their experiences for this article, but most were reluctant to do so, especially on record. Their perspectives have still informed this account. In general, they were proud of the game, but uncomfortable with the conditions they worked under. "It was brutal at times, especially near the end," says Andrew. "We were working seven days a week, averaging eighteen-hour days. It just burned people out. We had a lot of turnover, but I decided to stay because I just knew the project was going to be something different and something special. I love the game, and I love the fact that, almost 20 years later, people are still cherishing it."

**ANDREW WOOD**

■ Environment artist Andrew Wood helped design the distinct world of Bullworth.

Rockstar cofounder Dan Houser was the driving force behind *Bully*. Drawing on his time at St Paul's, a prestigious public school in London, he devised the concept and wrote the story, with the help of Jacob Krarup. Although school life had been the basis for countless coming-of-age films and TV shows, this inherently relatable premise had gone largely unexplored in gaming. "There was an energy and a vibrancy to the idea. The industry was just really starting to adopt open-world gaming. To see *Bully* taking that logic and putting it in a school playground was very interesting to us," says Andrew.

"THE MEMORIES OF IT ARE LOVE-HATE. IT WAS A FUN, WEIRD, HELLISH, CHAOTIC, AWESOME TIME. I REFLECT BACK FONDLY ON THE PEOPLE AND THE TIMES AND THE CRAZY THINGS WE DID AFTER HOURS, BUT THEN I THINK ABOUT THE STRESS!" **ANDREW WOOD**

» [PlayStation 2] A bike race against preppies takes Jimmy across the beach in Old Bullworth Vale.

» [PlayStation 2] Chemistry class is a rhythm-based minigame to unlock new weapons.

» [PlayStation 2] Breaking into Happy Volts Asylum to free Johnny, the greasers' leader.

Our introduction to this hostile environment is accompanied by the evocative strains of *Bully*'s main theme, perhaps the standout track from Shawn Lee's original score, which delivers a powerful shot of nostalgia and strikes an appropriately unsettling tone. "I was contacted by the music supervisor at Rockstar in New York – Ivan Pavlovich," recalls Shawn, a musician who's worked across a wide variety of genres. "They flew me over and he showed me a couple of pictures of the game. They didn't really tell me that much about it, other than it took place in a school and you were going to be running around and fighting. I had to sign an NDA (non-disclosure agreement).

"There were some creative discussions about the kind of thing they were looking for, which was quite vast, and relatively eclectic and complex," Shawn continues. "They hired me to do 12 pieces of music originally that would give the overall soundtrack its character. It seemed like an interesting opportunity. It was going to be a challenge."

Over the months that followed, Shawn delivered several batches of songs. The lack of visual prompts from the game to guide, or potentially constrain, his work turned out to be a blessing. "It was all made from imagination, which is a bit like reading a book as opposed to seeing a movie. Your mind can make up vivid stuff and be quite creative filling in the blanks," he says. "They gave me DVD-Rs full of reference music and basically all the clues were in there. All the things that they were into. Various film scores – vintage European soundtracks from the Seventies and Eighties, *Donnie Darko*, Danny Elfman. Then there were things like the Chemical Brothers and hip-hop. You had an eclectic jukebox full of music."

**Rockstar takes music seriously.** Whereas the *Grand Theft Auto* series is renowned for its use of radio stations with licensed tracks and distinct sensibilities, the developers realised that this approach wouldn't be suitable for *Bully*. The game seems to exist in an ambiguous time period and Jimmy's transport options don't feature a built-in radio. The score was programmed to dynamically respond to the on-screen action. Shawn performed all his own instruments, layering sounds on top of each other to achieve the desired effect. He worked under pressure, hounded by phone calls and emails from Rockstar, but was pleased with the end result. "I knew it was going to be more classic, organic and human. It would have my personality and my musicality in there," says Shawn. "They allowed me to do my thing, and I think that's why the music has lasted. I still get messages every week from people telling me how much they love the score and how much it was part of their life."

In essence, *Bully* is a toned-down version of *GTA*. While much less explicit, its themes are often dark and gritty. Weapons, violence, sexuality and gang warfare are still present, but in a way more befitting teenage students. Supercars and helicopters are traded for skateboards and bikes. Grenades and assault rifles become cartoony stink bombs and spud guns. Beneath the childlike exterior, there's the same twisted sense of humour that Rockstar is famous for.

The mechanics of *Bully* are familiar too. "A good 80% of the RenderWare engine and code was from *Vice City*," says Andrew. "Where we differed was our brawler-style gameplay that (lead designer) Mike Skupa, the animators and (animation coder) Liberty Walker really focussed on to make the combat fun and visceral. The choreography was hard for animators because you're

# WELCOME TO BULLWORTH

## JIMMY HOPKINS

■ The product of a dysfunctional family, Jimmy is strong-willed and defiant. Disdainful of unearned authority and abuses of power, he routinely fights against them. A risk-taker who's willing to get his hands dirty to achieve the right result.

## GARY SMITH

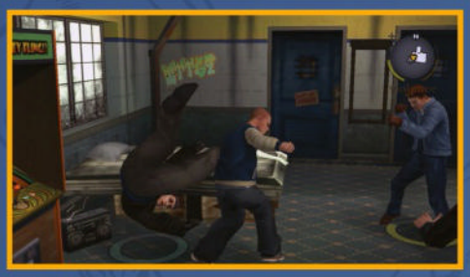
■ A narcissistic sociopath who befriends Jimmy before betraying him. Gary is cunning, sharp-tongued and relentlessly self-interested. After turning the school and town against Jimmy, he must be defeated in the final mission to liberate Bullworth.

## PETEY KOWALSKI

■ Gary's whipping boy and reluctant accomplice, described as 'too cool to be a dork; too dorky to be anything else'. Petey is honourable yet timid. He becomes Jimmy's closest ally in his fight to bring order to the school.

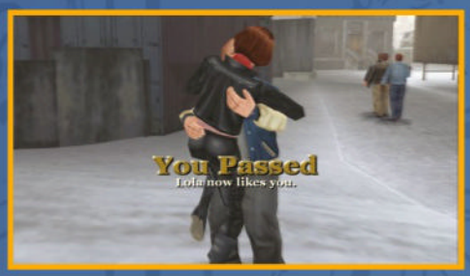
## DR CRABBLESNITCH

■ The principal is an arrogant disciplinarian who rules with an iron fist. Crabblesnitch is convinced of the virtues of the brutally competitive environment he's created. He distrusts Jimmy and is fooled by Gary's act.

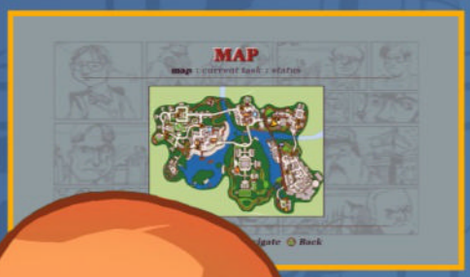


» [PlayStation 2] Beating up the greasers to claim their hideout – Blue Balls Pool House.

» [PlayStation 2] Firing a bottle rocket at one of the greasers during the fight with Johnny.




» [PlayStation 2] Kissing Lola, Johnny's girlfriend, after winning her affections in Chapter III.




» [PlayStation 2] The entirety of Bullworth is unlocked from Chapter V onwards.

getting into fistfights with other kids. If you took it too far, it would immediately get too violent and inappropriate."

**Compared to *GTA*, *Bully* gives players a relatively small, yet equally immersive, world to explore.** Jimmy is initially limited to the school grounds, before gaining access to Bullworth Town (the commercial hub) and Old Bullworth Vale (the upmarket suburbs). New Coventry (the dilapidated tenements) and Blue Skies Industrial Park open up later on. Billy Crane's Traveling Carnival and Happy Volts Asylum are two of the game's most memorable locations. Beyond the main story, each area contains numerous side missions, errands, collectables and races to enjoy.

*Bully*'s original aesthetic was very different from what it eventually became, as Andrew explains. "The game was pitched to me as an Americana piece. The goal was to have it look and feel more akin to a Norman Rockwell painting. That was cool because stylised graphics weren't really what they are today. A mandate came in from the Rockstar head office, midway through production, to make it more photoreal. That's when the art team pretty much purged itself from the studio, because we had to redo all the textures." It turned out to be a lot of work. "We had to revisit models that were more stylised and wonky-looking – straighten them out, readjust them," continues Andrew. "In the scramble of trying to shift gears and change the art direction, we ended up with this mix of both that, in a very broken, strange, happy-accident kind of way, really worked for that particular game and narrative. It has its own identity because of that decision."

Bullworth is populated by a colourful array of characters. There are 60 students, each with their own unique appearance, name, voice and personality. Most are aligned to one of five different stereotypical factions – bullies, nerds, preppies, greasers and jocks. Away from school, there are the townies. Many characters play significant roles in the story, which takes place across a whole school year, marked by changing seasons and missions related to specific holidays like Halloween and Christmas.

There are several teachers, from browbeaten ▶

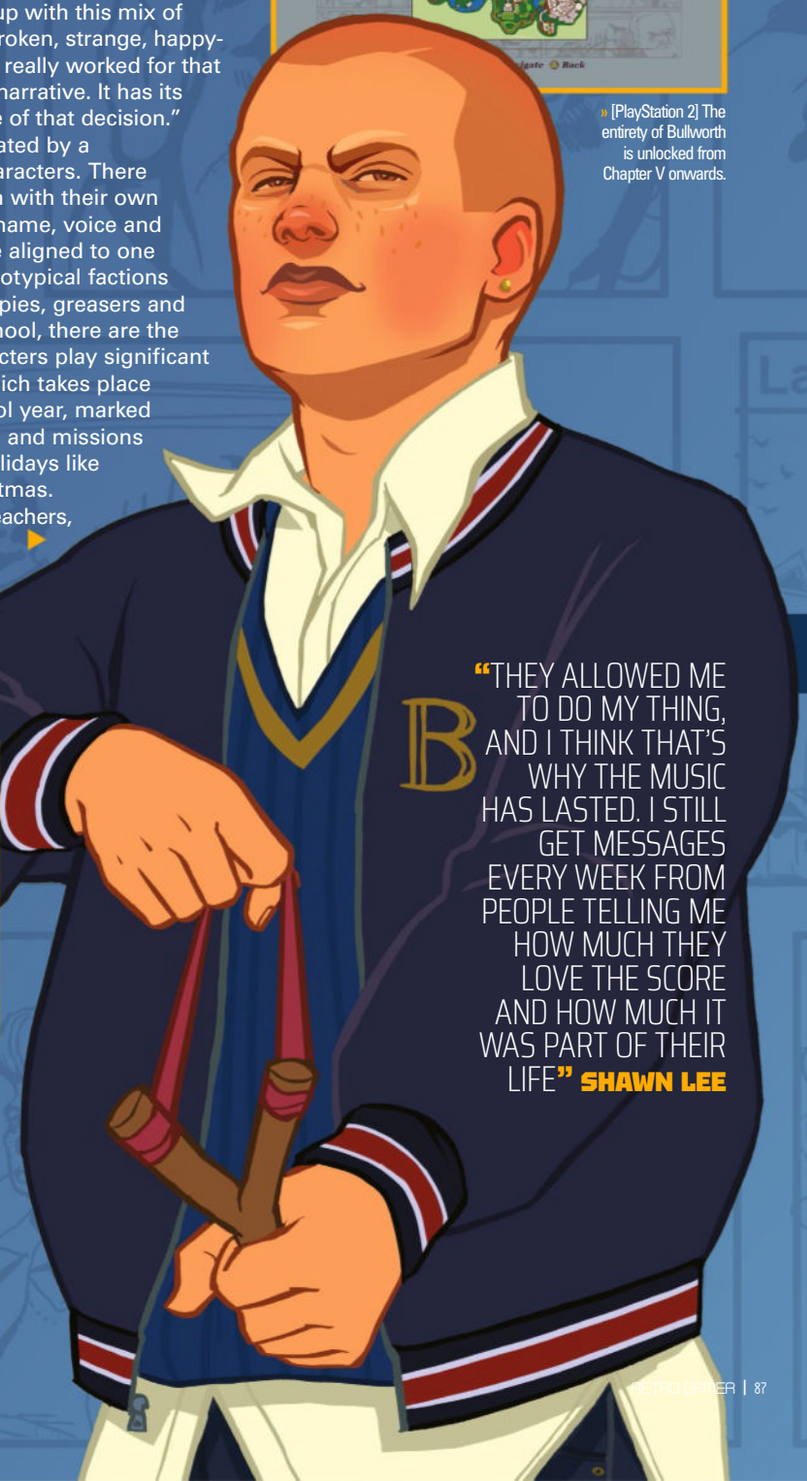
## MEET JIMMY, HIS KEY ALLIES AND ENEMIES

### ZOE TAYLOR

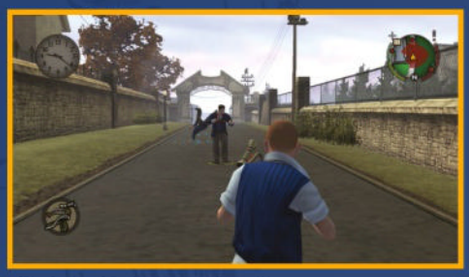
■ One of the townies and Jimmy's most significant love interest. Zoe left Bullworth Academy under a cloud after being abused by Mr Burton. Jimmy helps her gain revenge on him and triumphantly return to school.

### RUSSELL NORTHROP

■ The leader of the bullies, the first faction that Jimmy confronts and overcomes. Russell is a looming powerhouse full of misguided aggression. Instinctively loyal and lacking in intelligence, he becomes the perfect enforcer for Jimmy.



"THEY ALLOWED ME TO DO MY THING, AND I THINK THAT'S WHY THE MUSIC HAS LASTED. I STILL GET MESSAGES EVERY WEEK FROM PEOPLE TELLING ME HOW MUCH THEY LOVE THE SCORE AND HOW MUCH IT WAS PART OF THEIR LIFE" **SHAWN LEE**



» [PlayStation 2] Prefects pursue Jimmy if he causes any disorder on school grounds.

» [PlayStation 2] Jimmy can form romantic relationship with male and female students, partly by giving them gifts.

alcoholic Mr Galloway and the flirtatious Ms Philips to the authoritarian Mr Hattrick and sadistic pervert Mr Burton. Jimmy is often dragged into their personal lives and disputes. He can also attend various classes – English, Art, Chemistry, Photography, Gym and Shop – that function as self-contained minigames. Successfully completing them unlocks new items and abilities, aiding his progress.

Jimmy, who exists outside of Bullworth's clearly defined social structure, ultimately looks to tear it down for everyone's benefit. He does so by challenging and defeating each faction's leader to earn their respect and unite the school, but his efforts are undermined by the manipulative Gary Smith. As the first of *Bully*'s six chapters – Making New Friends And Enemies – comes to an end, it's revealed that, despite welcoming Jimmy to the school, Gary has actually been conspiring against him, setting up the game's central conflict. Their rivalry propels the narrative forward, culminating in a dramatic confrontation at the top of the school bell tower.

The production of *Bully* was defined by another running battle. "I don't think the capitalist, work-hard mindset from New York really gelled well with the more relaxed West Coast mindset, so there were a lot of clashes," says Andrew. "Rockstar would demand more hours and Rockstar Vancouver would push back on that. We saw a lot of people leave. The relationship was very strained."

**Rockstar's commitment to making exceptional, often ground-breaking, games, relied on an uncompromising approach that often took a huge toll on the people involved, damaging workplace morale and staff wellbeing.** "*Bully* was chaotic from the day I started until the day it shipped. Back then, Rockstar was a very different company – the concern was about the game over the employees. It was tough. There was a lot of burnout and tempers rising," explains Andrew. "There were constant internal conflicts due to the stress of always being at work. A couple of people had mental breakdowns. They snapped. It was difficult to work in that kind of environment, but I knew that *Bully* was going to be worth it in the end, so I stuck it out."

*Bully* was almost permanently on the brink of collapse. As one former employee outlines, everything came to a head in 2005. When Sam Houser – Dan's brother, the cofounder and president of Rockstar – travelled to Vancouver, he was infuriated by the development team's supposed lack of progress. Extra help was called in to lead the creation of a demo for E3, which was being held in May. The whole project was in a state of crisis and Rockstar Vancouver was under genuine threat of being closed down. A *Spec Ops* title it was working on had already been abandoned, alienating many of the team. Some left, while others moved over to *Bully*. There was lots of frustration, resentment and uncertainty.

At the Vancouver office, a group of a dozen or so employees came together to work late each day, racing against the clock to deliver a workable demo in time for E3. Most never realised just how perilous the situation was for both the game and the studio. Fortunately, Sam was delighted with the demo, which debuted at short notice on a *Bully* themed bus at the Los Angeles Convention Center, so everyone forged ahead.

*Bully*'s final year was particularly draining for the development team, who were forced to accommodate some unexpected late demands. "Skateboards came in two weeks before we released, so that was fun!" laughs Andrew. "We had a traversal system where the pedestrians interacted with the kerbs in a certain way. The skateboards didn't work with the

# POINTS AND PRIZES

## DODGEBALL

■ After completing the dodgeball lessons in Gym class, Jimmy can return to play for fun or cash, taking on Bullworth's other student factions with his team of nerds – Algie, Thad and Bucky. Best of three games wins.

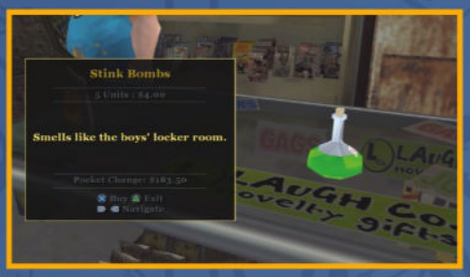
## PAPER ROUTE

■ Cycle around Old Bullworth Vale, the wealthiest part of town, delivering newspapers while being chased by dogs and harassed by preppies. The job is located at the newspaper stand with a sign that reads "News. Cigarettes. Lies".

## PENALTY SHOTS

■ Jimmy has five shots to knock out Constantinos, a fellow student who goads you while dancing along the wall between the goal posts. Bet up to $20 on the outcome. Once you master the timing, it's a quick way to earn cash.

» [PlayStation 2] Here's Jimmy sneaking around the girls' dorm to steal underwear for the sleazy Mr Burton.




» [PlayStation 2] Various items can be bought from shops like Dragon's Wing Comics, including stink bombs.

kerbs because they couldn't ledge up onto them. They'd get stuck, so we had to go through every single kerb and put them at a 45-degree angle. This was all last minute. That's kind of how Rockstar worked."

Harsh restrictions were introduced too. "When we were pushing to release the game, we were revoked our lunch and our dinner breaks. They actually catered food into the office because they didn't want us leaving! It started to feel like a prison for a lot of people."

**This adversity created a strong team spirit.** When *Bully* was finally released, staff were rewarded with a substantial bonus and three months' holiday. Seeing the response to the game, which won awards, sold well over a million copies and earned a sizeable cult following, gave them a lasting sense of satisfaction. An enhanced *Scholarship Edition*, available on Wii, Xbox 360 and PC, came out in 2008.

*Bully*'s initial release was accompanied by a media uproar over fears that it would promote violence and anti-social behaviour amongst teenagers. Many jumped to this conclusion based purely on its provocative title and Rockstar's controversial reputation. In the PAL region, covering much of Europe, the UK and Australia, the game was called *Canis Canem Edit* instead. In reality, *Bully* had a far more nuanced outlook than it was given credit for. It took risks and subverted expectations.

» [PlayStation 2] Facing Gary in the final battle to save Bullworth from his devious plot.

"Honestly, in the studio, we laughed at all the controversy," says Andrew. "They all made a big deal out of the name, *Bully*, but they didn't know that, ultimately, the game was an anti-bullying statement. We loved the attention because it was helping us to sell games. They were freaking out over something they didn't really know anything about."

Rumours of a sequel still resurface every so often. Rockstar New England were reportedly developing a game set in Jimmy's hometown during summer break after his first year at Bullworth, but the project was quietly discontinued in favour of *Red Dead Redemption*. Even now, almost two decades after the first instalment of *Bully*, a charmingly idiosyncratic game that showed so much potential, fans remain hungry for more. ✱

"THERE WERE CONSTANT INTERNAL CONFLICTS DUE TO THE STRESS OF ALWAYS BEING AT WORK. A COUPLE OF PEOPLE HAD MENTAL BREAKDOWNS. THEY SNAPPED. IT WAS DIFFICULT TO WORK IN THAT KIND OF ENVIRONMENT, BUT I KNEW THAT BULLY WAS GOING TO BE WORTH IT" **ANDREW WOOD**

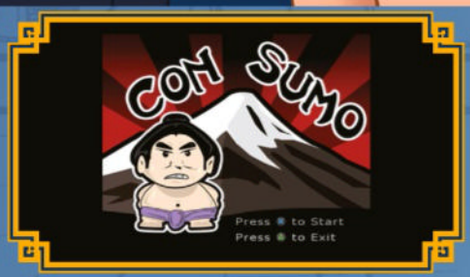
## BULLY'S ASSORTED MINIGAMES ADD DEPTH AND A FUN CHANGE OF PACE

### LAWN MOWING

■ A punishment sometimes inflicted by prefects, Jimmy can also mow lawns for money. Using a ride-on lawnmower, you need to cut as much of the grass as possible within the time limit to get the maximum payout. Simple yet curiously satisfying.

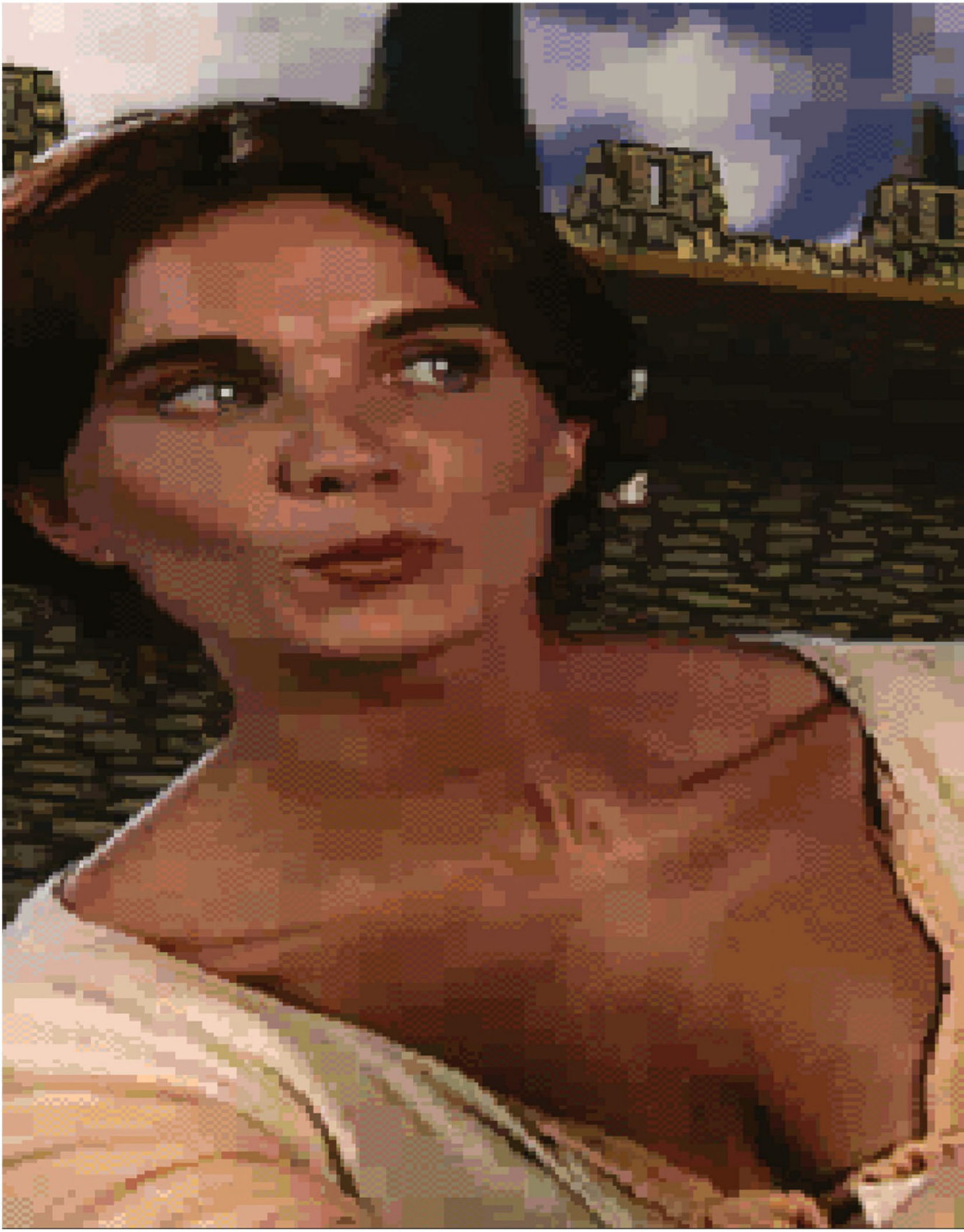
### GO-KART RACES

■ The carnival is full of rides and minigames, including go-kart racing. After completing the five Grand Prix Races for carnival tickets, street races against townies are unlocked, with prize money now on offer. More intense than bike races.




### CONSUMO

■ One of several arcade games (*Future Street Racer, Nut Shots, Monkey Fling*) found in the various hideouts, ConSumo is in the basement of Dragon's Wing Comics. Help your sumo gain as much weight as possible by collecting fresh food.



PRESERVED
GOOD OLD GAME
BY GOG
20%
OFF YOUR FIRST GOG PURCHASE USING CODE
RETROGOG20
(ONE-TIME USE)



# Stonekeep

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

» PC » 1995 » INTERPLAY PRODUCTIONS

**As much as I loved the excitement of console gaming, I always looked forward to visiting Mark's house.** My mate Mark was, and still remains, a member of the PC Master Race. He's certainly not snobbish enough to only play PC games and even may have owned a console at one time, but I've always known him to be a PC gamer first and foremost.

Mark was my introduction to *Dungeon Master* (back on his Atari ST), *Doom* and *Quake* and it was Mark who convinced me to properly invest in a gaming PC all the way back in 2010 after showing me the intricate detail of splintered ships as they disintegrated in a fierce battle during *Napoleon: Total War*. I'm pretty sure Mark doesn't have shares in Pentium, NVIDIA or similar brands, but he's certainly put a lot of my money their way over the years.

He always knew how to wow me with one of his new purchases and when he showed me *Stonekeep* it absolutely knocked my socks off. The game itself is effectively a *Dungeon Master* clone, albeit with some fancy-looking visuals and interesting combat mechanics, but the actual game didn't impress me anywhere near as much as *Stonekeep*'s flamboyant opening.

It depicts quiet life in a rural village following a fair maiden as she winds her way past other villagers and interacts with them, only for all hell to break loose. FMV certainly wasn't that new at this point, but *Stonekeep* had a cinematic sheen to it that few games of the day could match and I was mesmerised by it. "Looks amazing, doesn't it," Mark said as I watched the intro for what must have been the fifth time. I could only grunt in agreement.

We've come a long way since *Stonekeep*'s dynamic opening of course and while it's very cheesy by today's standards (you can check it out on both Steam and GOG) it still has a certain charm to it. In fact, I've had so much fun rewatching that opening cutscene I may give the full game another go.

>> This month we follow Joe Musashi and Ryu Hayabusa on their new adventures and play two new M2 compilations including the extremely impressive Gradius Origins

» [PC] You'll want to make sure you're suitably powered up before tackling an Ankou Rift.

retro GAMER SIZZLER

# Shinobi: Art Of Vengeance

## JOE MUSASHI'S LATEST ADVENTURE IS HIS BEST YET

**INFORMATION**

- **ALSO ON:** PS4, PS5, XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES S/X, SWITCH
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £24.99
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** LIZARDCUBE
- **BUY IT FROM:** ONLINE, RETAIL
- **PLAYERS:** 1

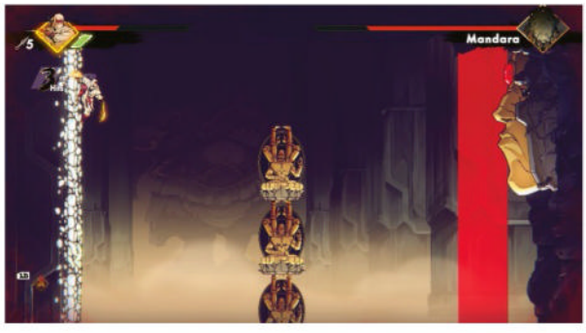
**If there's one developer out there that truly understands what makes Sega tick, it's surely Lizardcube.** While *Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap* was a simple update of the original Master System game (albeit with undeniably beautiful visuals) *Streets Of Rage 4* was a brand-new entry in the series that not only felt like a *Streets Of Rage* game, but helped reignite a long-ignored genre – the scrolling fighter. Now, the famed French developer is back and its latest game not only eclipses its earlier works of art, but is arguably the best game in the *Shinobi* series to date.

*Shinobi: Art Of Vengeance* is stunning, not just in its art design but also in its level design, creativity and sheer love that the team clearly has for its subject matter. Like *Prince Of Persia: The Lost Crown*, *Art Of Vengeance* builds on aspects of Sega's beloved series and finds ways to improve it, resulting in a game that will please existing fans and contemporary gamers alike.

» [PC] Traversal starts off quite easily, but the platforming can get frustrating as things progress.

Virtually every aspect of *Art Of Vengeance* is a delight, from its glorious hand-drawn art style that covers everything from wind-swept plains to dense, neon-lit cities, to its delightful nods to previous games in the series and other iconic Sega IP. Mechanically, *Art Of Vengeance* follows the well-trodden path of previous *Shinobi* games, with Joe Musashi fighting his way through enemy-infested levels at the same nippy pace that made the likes of *Shinobi* and *Shinobi III* so much fun to play.

Unlike previous games in the series though, Lizardcube's game encourages multiple playthroughs




» [PC] The game's bosses are a mixture of classic and new adversaries, and all are very challenging.

**BRIEF HISTORY**

» The original *Shinobi* debuted in 1987 and proved to be a financial success for Sega. The series arguably found its biggest success in the 16-bit era with *The Revenge Of Shinobi* and its sequel, before being reinvented in 2002 as a 3D action game. The last game in the series appeared on 3DS in 2011 to mixed reviews.

## ★ PICKS OF THE MONTH

**DARRAN**

**Operation Night Strikers**

It might only feature four games, but this is another cracking compilation of retro gems from the masters at M2.

**NICK**

**Ninja Gaiden: Ragebound**

This or *Shinobi*? It's too close to call and two cakes are better than one anyway, so I'm firmly in the 'both' camp.

» [PC] Ninpo magic can cause devastating damage or heal Joe to full health, like he's doing here.

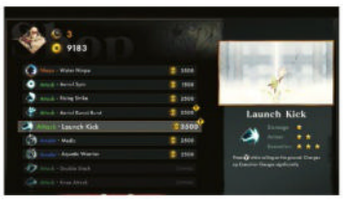
» [PC] There's plenty of nods to Sega throughout Joe's journey.

of each stage as it's the only way to fully complete them. As with Metroidvania games, each stage of *Art Of Vengeance* features gated off areas that can only be entered once the relevant ability has been acquired, from a glider that lets Joe catch handy updrafts, to claws that let him traverse certain walls and ceilings.

Each of the game's main levels features a number of tasks as well, such as finding a set amount of Oboro Relics, which can be used to unlock additional abilities in the shops Joe visits and an Ankou Rift, an intense area Joe warps to that features tight platforms and savage combat encounters that will push the ninja to his limits. Elite Squads are also something that Joe encounters, requiring the athletic ninja to dispatch hordes of enemies without dying in order to unlock further extras.

Fortunately, Joe is more than equipped for the task at hand as this is the most combat-focussed version of *Shinobi* we've ever had. As Joe's journey continues he's able to unlock a dazzling array of moves, from acrobatic kicks to dramatic combo finishers which enhance his already aggressive moveset. It's possible to pull off huge combo attacks as the game progresses and it feels genuinely satisfying laying waste to enemies with a few simple button presses.

» [PC] You can pull off some truly spectacular combos in *Art Of Vengeance*.




» [PC] Shops let Joe buy various items, from new moves to powerful magic.

Furthermore, reducing an enemy's energy tags them, allowing Joe to pull off a Shinobi Execution. Tag enough enemies without completely killing them and you'll create more spectacular chains. There's a lovely sense of momentum to Joe's movement in combat which further extends to his traversal abilities while navigating the game's gorgeous-looking levels. Magic attacks are also in Joe's arsenal and he's able to unlock a large number as the game continues, from useful healing spells to summoning a giant serpent that inflicts massive amounts of damage.

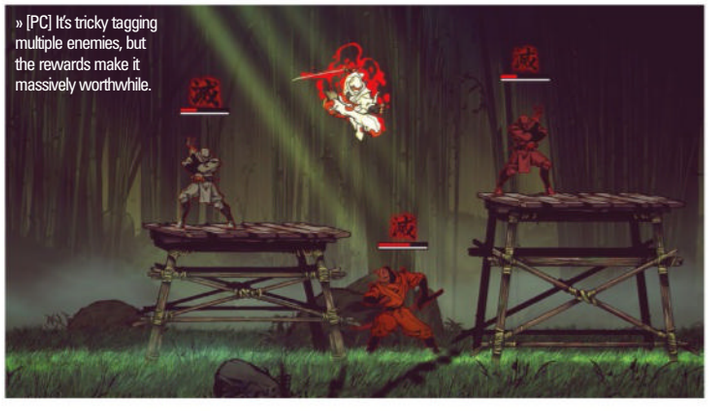
The only real complaints we have about Lizardcube's game is that the plot is incredibly bare-bones and weak with Joe facing off against the ENE Corporation and its evil master Lord Ruse and that the platforming difficulty borders on the frustrating once you reach the final few stages. These quibbles don't diminish the overall polish of Lizardcube's game however and there's plenty to do once the main story is completed as well, with an Arcade Mode and Boss Rush offering additional longevity.

*Shinobi: Art Of Vengeance* is quite simply superb. It's a dynamic blend of platforming and hardcore action and it breathes fresh new life into one of Sega's long-dormant IPs. If you're looking for a hard-hitting action game with spectacular visuals, a stellar soundtrack and well-honed combat mechanics it's hard to see how *Art Of Vengeance* will disappoint. ✱

## In A Nutshell

**A truly remarkable effort from Lizardcube that combines intense action with beautiful imagery. It's by far the best adventure Joe Musashi has even been on.**

>> Score **90%**

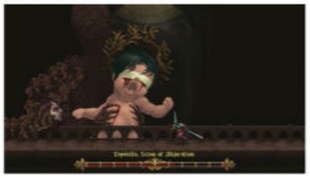


» [PC] It's tricky tagging multiple enemies, but the rewards make it massively worthwhile.

### ✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
**SHINOBI**

▼ SOMETHING NEW
**BLASPHEMOUS**



## PICK OF THE MONTH

# Gradius Origins

» **System:** PC (version tested), PS5, Xbox Series S/X, Switch » **Buy it for:** £32.98+ » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

**M2's *Gradius Origins* looks at the early years of the iconic franchise and while it's far from complete, it remains an impressively detailed look at the franchise's early arcade games.**

There's a staggering amount to sink your teeth into here with a huge number of interesting variants for the six included arcade games (*Gradius I-III*, *Salamander 1-2* and *Life Force*), from the 'Bubble System' edition of the original *Gradius* to the rare tradeshow 'AM' edition of *Gradius III*. It adds up to 17 variations across the available arcade games and they all feature the ridiculously high emulation quality we now expect from M2's ShotTriggers series.

There's a lot here in terms of tweakable extras too. In addition to the usual rewind, online leaderboards and save states, each arcade title features multiple modes. Original Mode is an accurate representation of the arcade game, Easy Mode greatly lowers the difficulty of the game and reduces enemy bullets, while Invincible Mode lets you complete the game without dying, but turns off achievements.

Even the historical content is solid with a huge amount of art, manuals and production information, as well as an excellent Sound Gallery that highlights some of the amazing tunes from across the series.

The final extra is *Salamander III*, a brand-new game, which is as much a love letter to *Gradius* as it is to *Salamander*. Designed to look like a lost Nineties arcade game, it features familiar enemies and bosses from the series and new mechanics like a burst attack. It's a great blaster, but feels more like a remix rather than a totally new experience.

While there's no denying the quality on offer here, it's disappointing that the likes of *Gradius 4*, *5*, *Gaiden* and *Rebirth* haven't made the cut, or any console variants for that matter. Still, this is another corker from M2 and an essential ShotTriggers release.

» **Score 90%**

» [PC] *Salamander* III is a great addition to the series, but we still prefer *Salamander II*.

» [PC] *Gradius Origins* features all the usual Widgets, so you can see everything from what music is playing to hitboxes.

## Ninja Gaiden: Ragebound

» **System:** PC (version tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, Switch » **Buy it for:** £20.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail (PS5 and Switch only)

**This 2D revival of Tecmo's classic action series sees Kenji of the Hayabusa Village forced to work with his Black Spider rival Kumori, in order to tackle a demonic threat.** The Game Kitchen and Dotemu have collaborated to create a very good game, which adopts a pixel art style to great effect and features an exciting soundtrack. It actually complements *Shinobi: Art Of Vengeance* well, too – *Ragebound* emphasises efficient sequencing of enemies for one-hit kills, rather than *Shinobi*'s combo-heavy approach. Accessibility options allow you to tweak aspects of the challenge, but the default difficulty level will satisfy fans.

**NICK THORPE**

» **Score 90%**

## Operation Night Strikers

» **System:** Switch (version tested), PC » **Buy it for:** £18.89+ » **Buy it from:** Online, Limited Run Games (Switch only)

**This package comprises four Taito arcade games – *Night Striker*, *Operation Wolf*, *Operation Thunderbolt* and *Space Gun*.** M2 is on development duties here so the emulation is rock solid, and there are plenty of neat little touches including extra status information in the screen borders, and explanations of what makes each arcade revision different from the next. It's a shame there's no way to use a lightgun but you do have the option of Joy-Con gyro aiming, plus mouse support on Switch 2. It's also nice that some home console conversions are available as DLC, though the £13.49 price tag for it feels a little high. Still, that can't sour a neat little compilation.

**NICK THORPE**

» **Score 87%**

## Heretic + Hexen

» **System:** PC (version tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, Switch » **Buy it for:** £13.49+ » **Buy it from:** Online, Limited Run Games

**The latest offering from Nightdive Studios is another impressive double-pack that's bursting with quality-of-life improvements and great extras.** In addition to including all the original content from *Heretic* and *Hexen*, the game also features a plethora of mods, cross-platform online play, a new soundtrack, numerous accessibility options, updated controls for consoles and handy weapon carousels. It also adds two, brand-new games as well, *Heretic: Faith Renewed* and *Hexen: Vestiges Of Grandeur*. The PC version also includes the DOS versions as an extra bonus. The end result is another essential restoration from Nightdive.

**DARRAN JONES**

» **Score 80%**

**QUICK!**
Voting Ends
Oct 31

— THE 43RD ANNUAL —

GOLDEN JOYSTICK AWARDS

# VOTE FOR YOUR GAMES OF THE YEAR!

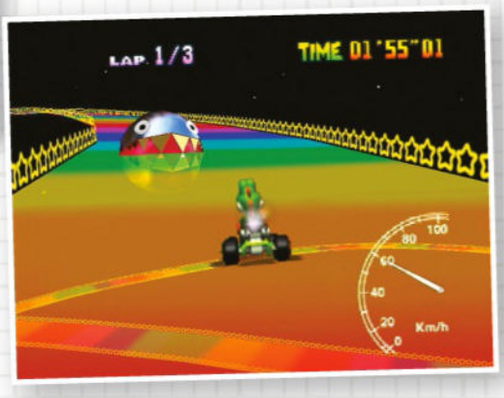
goldenjoysticks.com

# THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

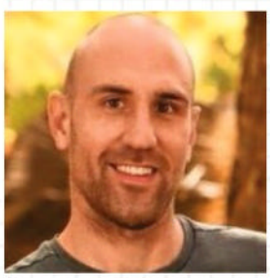
<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>

<!--- [DREAMCAST] THE BEAUTIFUL LIGHTING AND WEATHER EFFECTS OF VICE CITY LOOK STUNNING IN THEIR NEW HOME. --->

<!--- [DREAMCAST] COUNTER-STRIKE WILL FEATURE ONLINE PLAY FOR THOSE EAGER TO START PLANTING BOMBS. --->



<INTRO> THIS ISSUE'S COLUMN WAS WELL UNDERWAY WHEN I WENT AWAY FOR A BREAK WITH MY YOUNGER BROTHER IN ESSEX, AND ENDED UP IN HOSPITAL FOR 18 DAYS, REQUIRING TWO OPERATIONS. BACK HOME AND SLOWLY RECOVERING, I CAN STILL GUIDE YOU THROUGH AMAZING DREAMCAST DEVELOPMENTS, OUR CHAMPION CODER'S PROGRAMMING BOOKS FOR OLDER CONSOLES, A GREAT NES ROGUELIKE, AND THREE TERRIFIC GAME REVIEWS. THE HOMEBREW SCENE APPEARS TO BE IN GOOD HEALTH RIGHT NOW. </INTRO>



<!--- KALLISTIOS PROGRAMMER FALCO GIRGIS. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

## DREAMCAST DESIRES

<INTRO> AMAZING PROJECTS ARE IN PROGRESS FOR THE DREAMCAST, WITH KALLISTIOS PROGRAMMER FALCO GIRGIS AT THE HEART OF THEM </INTRO>

<BODY> **Megan Potter's KallistiOS first emerged around 2001 and is widely used by Dreamcast developers, supporting C and C++.** "It's an entire homebrew SDK – complete with toolchains, examples, documentation, tools, and more," Falco Girgis tells us. "It is incredibly approachable and easy to work with, with its standard library support and functioning as a complete mini operating system and kernel."

During development, assets need to be transferred. "Our virtual filesystem may be our single best feature," Falco continues. "Most of us stream our assets from our PCs during development before eventually swapping to CD-ROM access before release." Currently, the teams do not make any downloads available with binary assets from the original games; for example, *Grand Theft Auto III* comes with instructions to turn a Steam download into a bootable Dreamcast image.

The *GTA* projects made the headlines early in 2025, quickly followed by *WipEout* and the N64 conversions. These projects have taken serious optimisation of the code and the engine. "Typically, it starts with finding some bottlenecking C code [where things slow down or glitch – Andrew], then importing it into Compiler Explorer so I can fine-tune the code and view its generated disassembly in real-time," Falco explains. Other problems may need changes to the back-end code. "We are truly blessed to have an extraordinarily talented team of developers contributing to KallistiOS."

What has inspired such a rush of great projects this year? "KallistiOS finally reached maturity as a development kit, making it easier for newbies to approach the platform as well as allowing veterans to take better advantage of its hardware," says Falco. So what projects would Falco like to work on next? "The majority of them require a complete decompilation

## INCOMING ICONS

### SONIC MANIA
SonicFreak

<"*Sonic Mania* converts and processes the Steam assets into DC-friendly formats while the game is loading."/>

### WIPEOUT
jnmartin

<"You can unlock all the content, it runs at a fantastically high framerate, and jnmartin added a giant *Sonic Adventure 2* billboard!"/>

# NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

```
// This checks model A's spheres and lines against model B's spheres, boxes and tri
// Returns the number of A's spheres that collide.
// Returned ColPoints are in world space.
// NB: only vehicles can have col models with lines, exactly 4, one for each wheel
int32 CCollision::ProcessColModels(const CMatrix &matrixA, CColModel &modelA,
    const CMatrix &matrixB, CColModel &modelB,
    CColPoint *spherepoints, CColPoint *linepoints, float *linedists) {
#ifdef PS2_VU // Use VU0's "Work RAM"
    CVuVector *aSpheresA = (CVuVector*)SPR(0x0000);
    CVuVector *aSpheresB = (CVuVector*)SPR(0x0800);
    CVuVector *aLinesA = (CVuVector*)SPR(0x1000);
    int32 *aSphereIndicesA = (int32*)SPR(0x1200);
    int32 *aSphereIndicesB = (int32*)SPR(0x1400);
    int32 *aBoxIndicesB = (int32*)SPR(0x1600);
    int32 *aTriangleIndicesB = (int32*)SPR(0x1680);
    bool *aCollided = (bool*)SPR(0x1FE0);
    CMatrix &matAB = *(CMatrix*)SPR(0x1FF0);
    CMatrix &matBA = *(CMatrix*)SPR(0x2040);
#elif defined(DC_SH4) // Fuck da PS2; Use the SH4's "OCRAM," fast memory.
    static auto *aSpheresA          = reinterpret_cast<CColSphere*>(OCRAM);
    static auto *aLinesA            = reinterpret_cast<CColLine*>(OCRAM + 0x0800);
    static auto *aSphereIndicesA    = reinterpret_cast<uint16_t*>(OCRAM + 0x1000);
    static auto *aLineIndicesA      = reinterpret_cast<uint16_t*>(OCRAM + 0x1100);
    static auto *aSphereIndicesB    = reinterpret_cast<uint16_t*>(OCRAM + 0x1200);
    static auto *aBoxIndicesB       = reinterpret_cast<uint16_t*>(OCRAM + 0x1300);
    static auto *aTriangleIndicesB  = reinterpret_cast<uint16_t*>(OCRAM + 0x1340);
    static auto *aCollided          = reinterpret_cast<bool*>(OCRAM + 0x146c);
    static auto &matAB              = *reinterpret_cast<CMatrix*>(OCRAM + 0x1680);
    static auto &matBA              = *reinterpret_cast<CMatrix*>(OCRAM + 0x1780);
    matAB = CMatrix();  // Need to be reconstructed every frame, since OCRAM
    matBA = CMatrix();  // is transient, so matrix isn't full of shit.
#else // Vanilla boring software implementation.
    static int aSphereIndicesA[MAXNUMSPHERES];
    static int aLineIndicesA[MAXNUMLINES];
    static int aSphereIndicesB[MAXNUMSPHERES];
    static int aBoxIndicesB[MAXNUMBOXES];
    static int aTriangleIndicesB[MAXNUMTRIS];
    static bool aCollided[MAXNUMLINES];
    static CColSphere aSpheresA[MAXNUMSPHERES];
    static CColLine aLinesA[MAXNUMLINES];
```

<!--- [PC] WITH POLICE CARS ON FIRE IN THE BACKGROUND, KALLISTIOS OPTIMISATIONS HAVE BEEN ESSENTIAL TO GET GTA III RUNNING ON DREAMCAST. --->

<!--- [DREAMCAST] "FUNNILY ENOUGH, THE MOST TAXING MK64 CONFIGURATION IS 2-PLAYER GP MODE ON THE DREAMCAST," SAYS FALCO. --->

<!--- [DREAMCAST] MARIO KART 64 IS NOW PUBLIC; ALL THESE IMAGES WERE CAPTURED AT 480P FROM A DREAMCAST TO HDMI CONVERTER. --->

before we can do our thing. Since we already had to do a custom Renderware back-end for the *GTA III* and *Vice City* ports, I'd love to see *Sonic Heroes* or *Tony Hawk's Underground*. From the N64 side, jnmartin and I are huge *Wave Race 64* fans. I'm also a *Diddy Kong Racing* fanboy, and I believe that game has been fully decompiled…"

With *Driver 2* and the Xash3D Engine from maximqad (powering both *Half-Life* and *Counter-Strike)* announced, what comes next? "We have pcercuei, who is working on Bloom, a new PS1 emulator, and DC-SWAT, with the DreamShell, a full operating system including a desktop environment for Dreamcast!," says Falco. "On the Dreamcast side of KallistiOS, we have big plans to create easy-to-use APIs for exposing the DC's most advanced hardware features in terms of graphics and allowing developers to use the mysterious and elusive DSP for audio processing. Then we have Darc working on porting KallistiOS to GameCube and are hoping to expand our kernel to support other sixth-generation consoles in the future, such as the PS2." Stay tuned for news of more incredible Dreamcast conversions, including *Star Fox 64*. </BODY>

<INTRO> KEY FEATURES OF FIVE CONVERSIONS HEADING TO SEGA'S CONSOLE </INTRO>

### GTA VICE CITY

GTA Dreamcast Team

"Enhanced features over PS2, such as widescreen and anti-aliasing, dynamic weather such as rain and fog, and enhanced dynamic lighting."

### DOOM 64

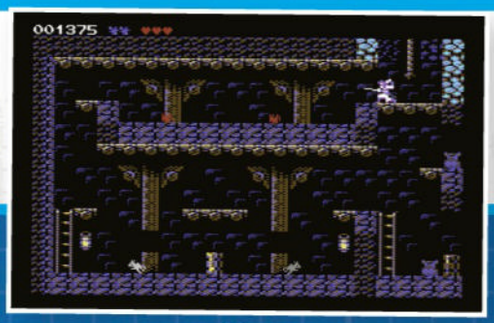
jnmartin & contributors

"Every map from the original, additional scenarios added to Steam/Switch, fancy new lighting and bump mapping at 60 frames per second."

### SUPER MARIO 64

MrNeo

"Esppiral has set off on a quest to enhance *Mario 64* with higher polygon models and *Mario Galaxy*'s lighting effects."




## NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> NOW ORGANISED BY FORMAT, HERE ARE THE LATEST NEWS BYTES TO ENJOY </INTRO>

**3DO:** Retro Love Letter converted the classic *Tempest 2000*. Get blasting at bit.ly/tempest-3do

**Amiga:** *Out Run: Amiga Edition* by Reassembler68K is a superb, optimised port of the arcade game, requiring at least a 68030 processor and the arcade ROM files. Race on over to bit.ly/outrun-amiga030

**Amstrad:** *Galastrad*, the *Galaga*-style shmup, is now available in cartridge format for the GX4000/Plus machines. Find it at bit.ly/galastrad-gx4000

**BBC Micro:** *Omnitris* is Alec Barker's Model B version of the often-overlooked *Tetris* sequel, *Welltris*. Get puzzling by visiting bit.ly/omnitris-bbc

**C64:** Psytronik has published *Musketeer (above)*, inspired by games including *Bruce Lee* and *Zorro*. Go to bit.ly/musketeer-c64 for the download and psytronik.bigcartel.com/ for physical versions (tape, disk, cartridge).

**ColecoVision:** ArugulaZ has created a sequel to *Solar Fox*, *Solar Fox 2: Space Evaders*. A digital download is currently $5, with a physical Collector Vision cartridge to follow. Beta versions for MSX and SG-1000 are also available via bit.ly/solarfox2

**Master System:** Badcomputer0 released the alpha demo of his impressive forthcoming vertical shmup, *Razing Core*. Discover it at bit.ly/razingcore-demo

**Mega Drive:** Z Team has released *Rick Dangerous DX* at bit.ly/rickd-megadrive

**MSX2:** Paxanga Software's 2010 cartridge version of *Pengo* is now free to download at bit.ly/pengo-msx2

**Various:** Arlasoft recreated the rare 1979 arcade game *Dracula Hunter* for Windows, Mac and Linux. You can play it online at bit.ly/dracula-hunter

**ZX Spectrum:** Fifteen great entries took part in this year's YRGB competition. Check out the incredible 3D platformer *Cubix* by Gogin and more by heading over to yrgb.org

## CHAMPION CODER

# ÓSCAR TOLEDO GUTIÉRREZ (NANOCHESS)

<INTRO> CHESS FAN OSCAR HAS WRITTEN BOOKS ON PROGRAMMING OLD CONSOLES AND HIS OWN GAMES </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: MEXICO CITY, MEXICO. WEBSITE: NANOCHESS.ORG
FORMAT: COLECOVISION, INTELLIVISION, MSX, SEGA MASTER SYSTEM, ATARI 2600
PREVIOUS GAMES: AKALABETH, THE LOST KINGDOM, THUNDER SOLDIER, PUMPKIN BAKERY WORKING ON: PUMPKIN TAXI (INTELLIVISION) />

### WHAT INSPIRED YOUR NEW PROGRAMMING BOOKS, OSCAR?

I had lots of experience with the Z80, and *Zombie Near* got second in the 2010 MSXDev contest. I followed with *Princess Quest* (2012), *Mecha-8* (2013) and *Mecha-9* (2015). I started studying more platforms, based on the Z80 and TMS9928 video processors. CollectorVision was looking for ColecoVision games to publish, so I started doing ports of my games.

<!--- OSCAR SITTING BESIDE HIS MACHINES, WITH HIS EXHIBITION BANNER BEHIND. --->

### WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

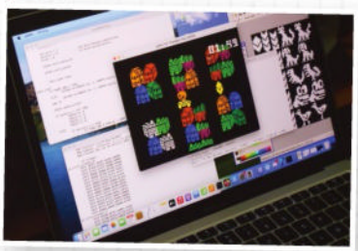
I started working on Intellivision around 2012. After converting *Princess Quest*, I was sure a better way of developing games could be devised. I secretly started coding a BASIC compiler (bit.ly/intybasic). I announced IntyBASIC v0.1 at the start of 2014. It hides the complexity while simplifying game development. I considered that a book was needed, *Programming Games For Intellivision* [which comes with demonstration games]. The sequel, *Advanced Game Programming For Intellivision*, includes a more advanced shooter game, a clone of *Oh Mummy!* and a pseudo-3D RPG. Around the same time, I wrote *Programming Boot Sector Games* to cover 8086 assembly language.

### WHAT OTHER PROJECTS HAVE YOU WORKED ON?

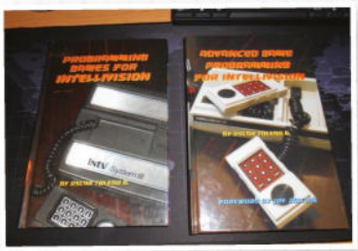
In 2024, I developed CVBasic (bit.ly/cvbasic) and released *Programming Games For ColecoVision*. This new compiler targets 11 Z80 platforms, Creativision (6502), TI-99/4A (TMS9900) and Master System. Your game basically can be compiled almost unchanged for 13 platforms; the 14th (Master System) has a somewhat different video processor that requires changes.

### TELL US MORE ABOUT *PUMPKIN TAXI*

Following the tradition (2023 was *Pumpkin Castle*, 2024 was *Pumpkin Bakery*), this is a small game where Pumpkin Smith drives through the city catching packages dropped in the street and delivering them, against the clock, and your smartphone navigator doesn't work! In advanced levels, the time becomes shorter, and there are animals blocking the way. The game will be released freely as a ROM download around September or October in the Intellivision section of the AtariAge Forums. All three games will be published in physical form as *Pumpkin Trilogy 2* from Homebrew Inc. />



<!--- EDITING GRAPHICS FOR THIS YEAR'S INTELLIVISION HALLOWEEN GAME, PUMPKIN TAXI. --->



<!--- WRITING THESE BOOKS ON THE INTELLIVISION SUPPORTED THE COMPILER INTYBASIC. --->

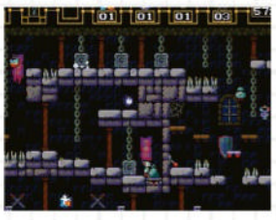
## DATA BURST 0

<INFO FORMAT: ZX NEXT CREDITS: FUSION RETRO GAMES (PUBLISHER), DAVE CLARKE (DESIGN, CODE), SIMON BUTLER (GRAPHICS), PAUL HESSO (MUSIC) PRICE: STANDARD EDITION (DVD CASE) £25, DELUXE EDITION WITH COLLECTABLES (SIGNED POSTCARD, MANUAL, SOUNDTRACK CD) £45 WEB: BIT.LY/0-NEXT />

<BODY> **The Fusion Retro Vault has been compromised, and the battery-powered Retrobot must retrieve the missing relics.** After the great introductory sequence, we are firmly in classic Spectrum platform action with modern twists (including a mode with unlimited lives). On each screen are patrolling enemies, as well as spikes and crushers that kill Retrobot. He can pick up batteries for extra lives and grab coloured keys to open gates. Retrobot can also collect Relics that include CRASH and ZZAP logos, and cute little Olibugs (in memory of Oli Frey). What's clever about *O* is the way puzzles move across screens; you might have to move a weight to a pad on one screen to unlock a moving lift on the next screen. Levers help open more of the screen, and you always respawn at the closest doorway or safe platform you stood on. There is a ticking time limit to consider (that can be increased with hourglasses), but the real skill is pausing to analyse patrols and the route ahead. With the third Next Kickstarter successful, this is exactly the kind of game that fans of the system needed. Fast reflexes and logical thinking will get you through, and the 50 screens (with the later sewers and industrial areas adding graphical variety) are a big challenge. *O* is a debut designer's masterpiece, supported by a talented team, which neatly highlights just what the Next is capable of. </BODY>

**SCORE:** 90%

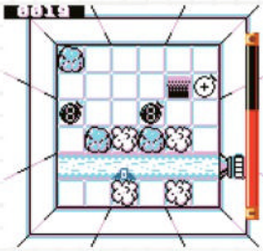
<!--- [ZX NEXT] THE SECOND SCREEN WITH RELICS TO COLLECT, AND THE LEVER ON THE RIGHT OPENS THE GATE TO ACCESS THE GREEN KEY. --->



<!--- [ZX NEXT] PLACING THIS WEIGHT ON THE PAD HAS STARTED THE MOVING LIFT ON THE RIGHT, GIVING YOU ACCESS UNDERNEATH. --->

# NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**



<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] THE ENDLESS DANGER ROOM MODE CHALLENGES YOU TO REACH A HIGH SCORE, WHICH CAN BE PRINTED ON YOUR GAME BOY PRINTER. --->

<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] WITH A FRIEND IN TOW, TAKE IT STEP BY STEP AND DON'T RUSH AS ROCKS FALL AND BOMBS EXPLODE. --->

## D*FUZED

<INFO FORMAT: GAME BOY / GAME BOY COLOR CREDITS: INCUBE8 GAMES (PUBLISHER & CO-DEVELOPERS), ASOBI.TECH (DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT) PRICE: DIGITAL EDITION $9.99, STANDARD EDITION $43.99, COLLECTOR'S EDITION $69.99 WEB: INCUBE8GAMES.COM />

<BODY> **Deef, the bomb-disposal robot, must save his friends.** Falling bombs have a number, showing how soon they will explode and cause chain reactions. Deef fills the bar on the right by collecting bombs while avoiding explosions. Later levels add rocks, moving lava, cannons, and more for Deef to navigate. Every fourth zone, you free a friend who follows you until the level is complete. Six locations (beach, jungle, volcano, castle, factory and laser fortress) of four zones must be cleared to reach the boss. This passion project from Quang was completed with Incube8's help. Voice acting adds to the evolving plot, and the gameplay is very moreish, while the standalone Danger Room mode works well. A very cute and enjoyable portable logic game. </BODY>

**SCORE:** 87%

<!--- [C64] USE YOUR BOW TO DISPATCH THE TWO ZOMBIS BEFORE CLIMBING TO THE NEXT LEVEL. --->

<!--- [C64] THE STATUS PANEL SHOWS ALL YOUR EQUIPMENT, THE MAP OF YOUR CURRENT LEVEL, AND THAT YOU HAVE BEEN POISONED. --->

## ROGUEISH

<INFO FORMAT: C64 (NTSC & PAL COMPATIBLE) CREDITS: SYNTAX ERROR SOFTWARE (PAUL NICHOLLS DESIGN & CODE, NORDISCHSOUND MUSIC), K&A SOFTWARE (CASSETTE VERSION PUBLISHER) PRICE: NAME YOUR OWN PRICE DOWNLOAD, PHYSICAL CASSETTE TBC WEB: BIT.LY/ROGUEISH64 />

<BODY> **Inspired by *Porklike* (PICO-8) and using 1-bit art assets, your adventurer climbs a tower of increasingly difficult floors.** Turn-based movement sees you fighting by pushing into enemies (using sword and shield) or firing your bow at a distance (with no shield allowed). Defeated enemies drop weapons and armour with buffs. Buffs and enemy attacks cause more damage, including poison, which can be healed with potions, while gold is spent on equipment between levels. With increasing numbers of stronger opponents, there is a good challenge once the roguelike gameplay grabs you. </BODY>

**SCORE:** 83%

## PROCESSING

<INTRO> RELIC DUNGEON FROM LIBRA BITS CHALLENGES YOU TO SURVIVE 100 DANGEROUS FLOORS OF THE NES-GENERATED ROGUE-LIKE DUNGEON </INTRO>

<BODY> **The inspiration for Libra Bits new game comes from various classics.** "The main inspiration I drew from was the *Ancient Cave Of Lufia 2: Rise Of The Sinistrals* (SNES) – a mode where the player tries to beat a randomly generated dungeon of 100 floors. The controls are in the classic style of an action RPG, coming from *The Legend Of Zelda* (NES). More influences include *Terranigma*, the *Mana* series and *Final Fantasy*."

Libra Bits tells us that programming was done using Pubby's NESFab. "It has become a very stable programming language for making NES games, including a great community with ongoing work/updates. For graphics, I use Paint.net. Music and sound have been created with FamiTracker. I wrote my own tools in C# for creating room layouts and data conversion/compression."

A demo can be found at bit.ly/relicdungeon, while the full version 1.1 will be priced at $8. "I received lots of constructive criticism and suggestions on how to improve the game. There will be the possibility to order cartridges directly from me, unless a publisher would like to do it in larger numbers." </BODY>

<!--- [NES] ARMED WITH THE FIREBALL (PICKED UP IN THE OTHER SCREEN), OUR HERO FIGHTS A BOSS EVERY TEN LEVELS. --->

# HOT TOPIC

**RETROBATES** MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

## IT'S TOTALLY WAR!

### The team get schooled on the epic Total War series

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

**Our talented designer Andy joins us this month, because his knowledge of Creative Assembly's series is almost as impressive as his ability to design great pages of the mag.** Lead on, Andy.

**ANDY**

So what's everyone's first experience with *Total War*?

**TIM**

I have never played a *Total War* game. I've read lots of articles about *Total War* for PC Gamer, but even then my knowledge is severely lacking.

> "That was always the most impressive aspect for me as an outsider, the sheer scale of the battles"
>
> NICK THORPE

**NICK**

Erm… I think it would have been the spin-off, *Spartan: Total Warrior*. I quite liked that, but it's obviously nothing like the main series.

**DARRAN**

I've not played too many, but it's a series I've always been fascinated by due to how visually impressive the games look. I've often found the gameplay a little too complicated.

**ANDY**

Back in 2005 there was a game show on BBC2 called *Time Commanders*, it featured a team of four contestants replaying a historical battle, mostly from antiquity. The battles were fought on a modified game engine which would go on to be used in *Rome: Total War*.

**DARRAN**

Yes, Andy, that's where my experience first came from. It seemed amazing at the time that a historical-based show was using a videogame as a way of presenting the battles.

**TIM**

Yep, I remember that show, I was utterly bored by it. Can we talk about *Dawn Of War – Dark Crusade* instead?

**DARRAN**

That's not a *Total War* game!

**TIM**

It's totally got wars in it!

**NICK**

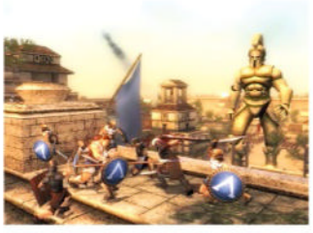
Isn't that a *Warhammer* thing? I've actually got a *Total War: Warhammer* game, as well as a couple of others like *Shogun 2* and *Troy*, across Steam and Epic. Andy, any idea which of them I should try first?

**ANDY**

*Shogun 2* is considered one of the best *Total War* games of all time, and definitely the best historical *Total War* since it moved into the Warscape engine. If you like fantasy then *Warhammer II* is also a really good choice.

**DARRAN**

I've also got a bunch of games sitting in my Steam library, including *Warhammer II*. Do the *Warhammer* games have any mechanics that aren't in the others, Andy? Surely flying was a new thing?


» [GameCube] *Spartan: Total Warrior* was a spin-off game that played more like *God Of War*.

**ANDY**

It was the first non-historical *Total War* with its high fantasy setting. It included lots of stuff you would find in other games like flying units and magic. The only other game in the franchise with anything close to that is *Troy* which has a *Mythos* DLC pack which added in mythological creatures such as Centaurs, Harpies and Cyclopes.

**DARRAN**

So one thing I have noticed is that *PC Gamer* tends to do a fair few *Total War* covers. You worked on a PC mag Andy, why do you think that is?

**ANDY**

It's one of the last big PC exclusive games. So I guess when you put it on the cover you know you weren't going to be competing with the console mags.

» [PC] The *Mythos* expansion for *A Total War Saga: Troy* featured classic mythical beasts like the Cyclops.

» [PC] The *Warhammer* universe has proven to be an excellent fit for *Total War* and there's now three games in the series.

» [PC] Battles in *Napoleon: Total War* can take place on the ground as well as the sea.

**TIM**

I'm not even sure, despite reading all those features, what kind of games they are. Not quite real-time strategy? Or exceedingly real-time strategy?

**DARRAN**

My strongest memory of the series is *Napoleon: Total War* because my mate Mark brought his rig around and showed me a sea battle. It was incredible with bits of ship splintering and you could zoom in and see all the carnage on a grander scale. Has the series always pushed things visually like this, Andy?

**ANDY**

Yes. The focus has always been on the battles, even though the campaign is a big part of it and you might spend more time on the campaign map. The first two games in the series use sprites on a 3D battle map. *Rome: Total War* was the first to use 3D soldiers, although all the models in the unit would look the same. With *Medieval II* they added variety for the soldiers in each unit and even allowed for armour upgrades to be represented in battles.

**NICK**

That was always the most impressive aspect for me as an outsider, the sheer scale of the battles. Speaking of the campaigns, what's your favourite one?

**ANDY**

My favourite is still *Rome: Total War*. The game pushes you to play as one of the three Roman factions. At the start two other Roman factions are your allies,

» *Time Commanders* was many of the team's first experience with the popular series, including Darran.

but as you conquer more land and your faction gains popularity the Senate faction will slowly turn on you, and you'll be forced into a civil war against the Senate and the other two Roman factions.

**DARRAN**

While we're on the subject of *Rome*, is the remaster of the original game worth picking up?

**ANDY**

If you like the original it is. For starters the original is quite hard to get running on modern machines, and it has a great selection of mods, both new ones and older ones that have been ported over to it.

**DARRAN**

Well considering the trouble I've had with DOS Box lately, this remaster seems the way to go, thanks, Andy.

» [PC] *Shogun: Total War*, the first game in the series, was originally published by Electronic Arts.

» [PC] *Rome: Total War* remains Andy's favourite in terms of campaigns. He recommends the *Remastered Edition*.

» [PC] There's no denying that seeing combatants duke it out in *Rome: Total War* was rather exciting.

# READERS REACT

## What's your favourite Total War game?

**GamesInTheAttic**

*Shogun: Total War*. I think I never won... maybe ditching diplomacy and going all in on the battles had something to do with it. And I loved the option to just roll the dice and see the outcome of the battles. It meant more time to invade other places.

**Ash**

It's probably *Empire*. It came out when I was in either year 11 or lower sixth form. My favourite lesson in school was always history, particularly war history. Building a massive army as Great Britain and IMMEDIATELY attacking France was too tempting to ignore. John Churchill FTW.

**XenoROM**

The original *Rome: Total War*. It has great depth and an excellent campaign. The game screams nostalgia and it's always installed and ready to dive into anytime.

**Vance the Happenstance**

When I first played this game the scale of battle tactics and unit count was mind-blowing back in 2004. Coming off RTS games this grand strategy and tactics title changed the way I viewed what a top-down strategy game could actually be.

# COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

**SPYRO: YEAR OF THE DRAGON PSONE CONSOLE VARIANT (CONTENTS SEALED)**

"This popped up on eBay, and I couldn't resist it."

AMOUNT PAID: £200

**PHILIPS DISCOVERER 'SPACE HELMET' CRT TV**

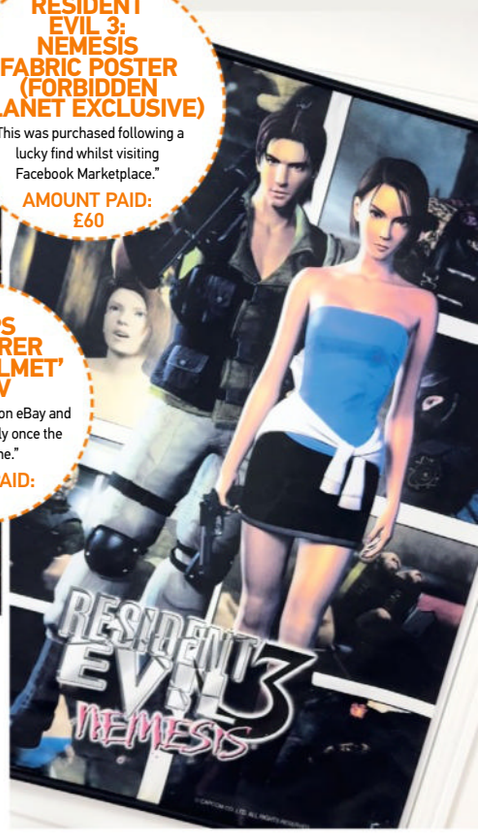
"This was being sold on eBay and was picked up locally once the deal was done."

AMOUNT PAID: £150

**RESIDENT EVIL 3: NEMESIS FABRIC POSTER (FORBIDDEN PLANET EXCLUSIVE)**

"This was purchased following a lucky find whilst visiting Facebook Marketplace."

AMOUNT PAID: £60



## BIO

**NAME:**
Hollie

**LOCATION:**
Grimsby, UK

**ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:**
£25,000

**FAVOURITE SYSTEM:**
Sega Saturn

**FAVOURITE GAME:**
Resident Evil 2

**YOUTUBE:** @HolsterTV

# HORROR HAUL

## Survival horror games, and Resident Evil titles in particular, are a big focus for Hollie's impressive games collection

Words by Faith Johnson

**For horror game lover, streamer and collector Hollie, it all started when her dad introduced her to *Resident Evil*.** "I first discovered gaming from my dad's love of horror videogames, especially the *Resident Evil* franchise. I'd watch him play the original trilogy of games and, after some time, he basically placed the controller in my hand and said, 'Your turn now, off you go!'"

When Hollie grew up, she began thinking about those good times. "I started longing to relive my retro gaming past during my early 20s and remembered how many of my old games I'd lost or sold over the years," she explains. Ten years ago, Hollie decided she wanted to get all those games back and started collecting, and it led to more great experiences. "During my collecting journey, I've discovered so many games that I'd missed out on back in the day. Obscure PS1 horror games, *Clock Tower*, *Chaos Break*, *Hellnight*, but also higher-end Saturn games, such as *Mr Bones*, *Frankenstein* and *Panzer Dragoon Saga*."

For all the new experiences, it was also *Resident Evil* that Hollie was the fondest of. "I remember the pure fascination with how the original trilogy captured survival horror," Hollie tells us. "I was just completely immersed and lost in those worlds, soaking in the horror as a kid, especially with *Resident Evil 2*. It felt like no other game; hearing zombie moans, the patter of zombie dogs' paws, lickers' claws scraping along floors, even Mr X's thudding footsteps. That was, and still is, the beauty of fixed camera angles and the suspenseful build-ups to those memorable, horrifying encounters. *Resident Evil* will always hold a special place in my heart, not only for nostalgia, but also as the main inspiration behind my gaming channel and the current journey to pursue content creation streaming full time."

We ask Hollie why she feels the series is still so popular today. "I feel that the series is still well loved because it really did create true survival horror, since the very first game. The series has thankfully continued the legacy of many original characters whom we've grown to love over the years. I think a huge portion of the fanbase respects the series' roots and still appreciates the classic feel of the originals."

Hollie also loves to hunt for games at car-boot sales and markets and records her adventures. We ask her what it is she enjoys the most about making these videos. "I've always loved creating content from my retro videogame hunting adventures, as I get such a thrill from the unknown, not knowing what gaming treasures or obscurities I could come across. I love sharing my experiences with other gamers to hopefully inspire them to go on their own adventures with retro collecting."

We finish up by asking Hollie what her grail item is for her *Resident Evil* collection. "A grail item for my collection would have to be the *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* Dreamcast transparent and red console. It looks incredible, along with the blue variant, which has the STARS logo on, which is even rarer. I'm determined to add both to my collection one day."

**Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:**

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogamermag.bsky.social

## NES DELUXE SET (CONTENTS SEALED)

"I'm a member of many Facebook gaming groups and picked this beauty up on one."

**AMOUNT PAID: £800**

## JEWEL IN THE CROWN

### RESIDENT EVIL 2 ZOMBIE COP STANDEE

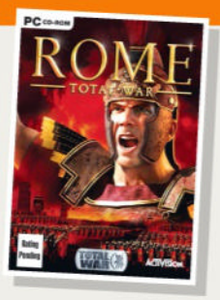
■ "Another collector put this up for sale on Facebook, and I was thrilled to grab it."

**PAID: £90**



# BARGAIN HUNT

**Your guide to the rising world of retro prices**




THE COVER STAR

## ROME: TOTAL WAR (PC)

Rome wasn't built in a day, but your collection of this strategy classic can be. There are lots of versions available for under **£5** especially the budget releases, and even the original print will cost under **£10.**

## SCOOBY-DOO (ZX SPECTRUM)

We may ask where he is, but Scooby's first Spectrum outing is easy to find. The original version sells for **£10,** while the budget release is about **£5.**

## THE CHAOS ENGINE 2 (AMIGA)

Finding a complete copy of this classic by The Bitmap Brothers is no easy task, as Mike Montgomery pointed out to us in our Making Of article on page 46. There aren't many copies to buy, and one recently sold for almost **£150.**

## MORTAL KOMBAT 3 (MEGA DRIVE)

There are plenty of opportunities to scream "get over here" into a collection, as complete copies sell for under **£20.** Loose carts can be had for as little as **£10.**

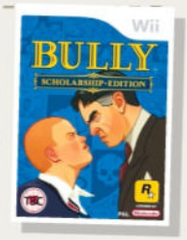
## HERETIC (PC)

Big box PC collecting comes with big prices, and *Heretic* is no different. Not many copies are out there, so you can expect to pay over **£100** for a complete copy in great condition

## WORLD SERIES BASEBALL (ZX SPECTRUM)

You can hit a home run with ease, as there are plenty of copies out there priced at about **£5.** Even the Hit Squad version will only cost **£12.**

## BULLY: SCHOLARSHIP EDITION (WII)




No need to bully your wallet to get a copy of Rockstar's excellent naughty schoolboy simulator. Most complete copies sell for about **£7** and sealed copies rarely top **£20.**

## SPACE INVADERS EXTREME (PSP)

We don't really understand why, but the PSP version of this excellent shooter is still exceptionally cheap to buy. Basically, if you're paying more than **£5** for a complete copy of the game, you're paying too much for it.

## SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2 (MEGA DRIVE)

You won't need a lot of gold rings if you want to buy a copy of Sonic's second Mega Drive adventure. Complete copies as well as carts are plentiful and range in price from **£3** to **£10.**

HOW MUCH?!

## PRIMAL RAGE (32X)

Paying **£2,800** to witness dinosaurs and giant apes blow off at one another on a 32X will put most folks into a rage, but collectors are going to collect. That **£29** price tag on the cover is harsh as well.

Prices correct at time of print

» [PlayStation] Ruka unleashes her homing lasers in the second stage, a jungle swamp.

# RAPID RELOAD

**It's not Halloween, but Axel and Ruka still have to fight off the Pumpkin Heads in this early PlayStation run-and-gun. It's a clear tribute to a Mega Drive classic – does it live up to its inspiration, and can it justify the hefty price tag it now commands?**

Words by Nick Thorpe

## IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** SONY
- **» DEVELOPER:** MEDIA VISION
- **» PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION
- **» RELEASE:** 1995
- **» PRICE TODAY:** £190+

» *Rapid Reload* may have been renamed for its PAL release, but it kept the Japanese cover art.

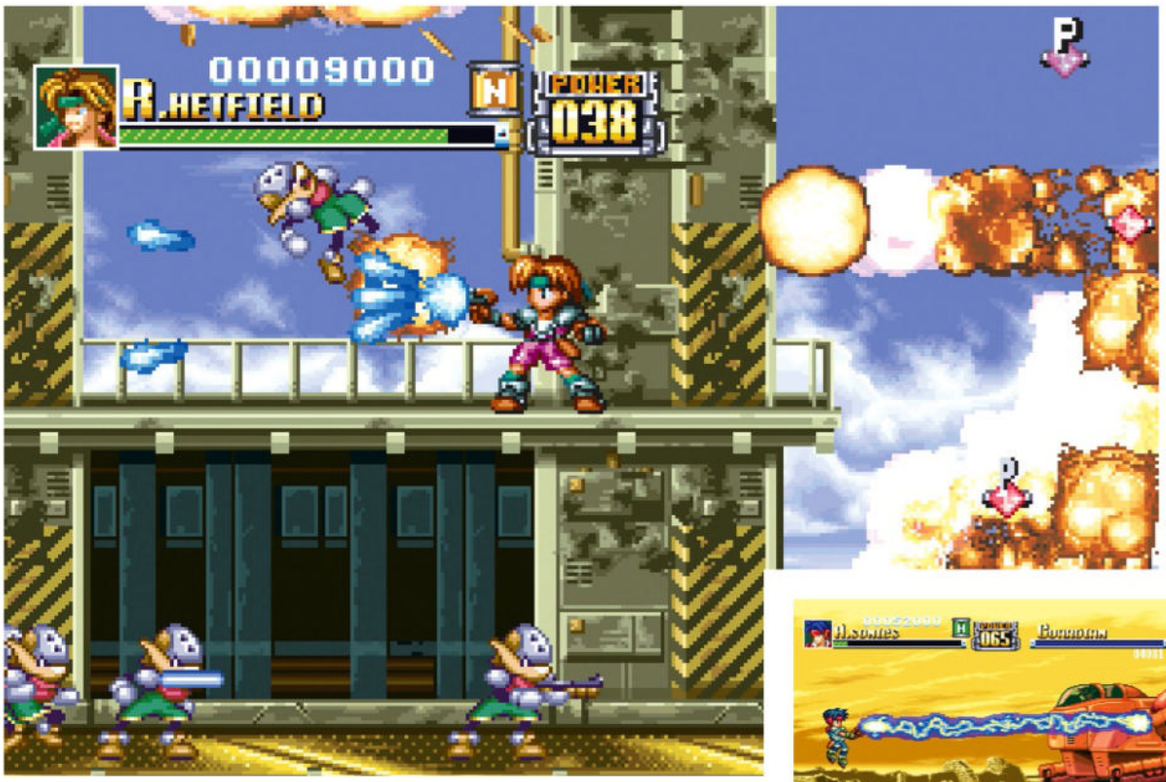
## THE GAME

*Rapid Reload* – or *Gunners Heaven*, as it's known in Japan – is a traditional run-and-gun game in which you take control of either Axel Sonics or Ruka Hetfield, treasure hunters on a quest to find a stone called the Valkiry. Naturally, an evil bunch called the Pumpkin Heads also want it so they can achieve world domination, so you've got to shoot your way through their forces in order to stop their nefarious plans and claim the prize for yourself. There's no multiplayer mode though, so you'll have to go it alone.

The game bears many striking similarities to Treasure's Mega Drive classic *Gunstar Heroes*, from your ability to slide on the ground to the way you throw enemies at close range, and from the overall level of carnage to the four major categories of weapon – standard fire, homing shots, flame shots and a weapon that reacts to the terrain. Axel and Ruka have unique variations on each type of weapon, so it's worth trying out both. Where the game differs from its inspiration is that you can change between weapons at any time, but keeping them at high power requires you to constantly collect pick-ups. Thankfully, the weapon power countdown stops during the game's pretty tricky boss fights. You also get a limited supply of screen-clearing bombs and a grappling hook that helps you to reach higher platforms – a tool that never proves essential, but provides some welcome agility during *Rapid Reload*'s more hectic scenes.

## THE QUALITY

Just about every review of *Rapid Reload* in 1995 commented on two things: its obvious similarity to *Gunstar Heroes*, and its old-fashioned 2D visuals. How much of a problem those factors were depends on the review you read, and scores were all over the place. *Computer & Video Games* said that drawing inspiration from Treasure's game was "no bad thing" and gave the "dead smart" run-and-gun 89%, while *Maximum* said that "in every respect the lowly 16-bit Sega title trounces this game" and gave it 2/5. There's truth in both extremes. Where *Gunstar Heroes* performed feats you thought your Mega Drive incapable of, *Rapid Reload* feels like something your Mega Drive could do, but who's seeking that




» [PlayStation] *Rapid Reload* certainly isn't short on explosions – the overall level of carnage is high throughout.

new hardware wow factor from the PlayStation now? *Rapid Reload* may not feature anything as creative as the Dice Palace or Seven Force, but it offers varied levels and tight controls, resulting in a blaster that delivers a really solid take on a familiar genre without trying to reinvent the wheel.

## WHY IT'S EXPENSIVE

*Rapid Reload* was simply one of the less popular games of the PlayStation's European launch line-up, likely because its 2D graphics didn't impress in the way that games like *WipEout* and *Battle Arena Toshinden* did. Of course, the PlayStation didn't yet have the massive install base that it would eventually amass, so it was an unpopular game in a relatively small market. By contrast, *Gunners Heaven* is more common as it sold relatively briskly for a few weeks in Japan, cracking *Famitsu*'s all-formats top ten and only sitting behind *Tekken* and *Jumping Flash* on PlayStation, but soon slipped out of the top 30. Sony Computer Entertainment America was infamously unfavourable towards 2D games in the PlayStation's early days, so *Rapid Reload* wasn't released at all in North America, creating some extra competition for the already limited supply of copies elsewhere.

## CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES

Sony has rarely ever dusted *Rapid Reload* off – it was made available digitally in Japan and Asia during the PlayStation 3 era, but it hasn't been carried forward to current platforms. Japanese PlayStation copies are cheaper, with *Gunners Heaven* typically ranging from £50-£80, and there's no language barrier to gameplay. If you want the inspiration rather than the imitation, Mega Drive copies of *Gunstar Heroes* aren't cheap on their own, but the *Classic Collection* compilation includes it and can be found for £20-£40. It's also available for purchase on Xbox consoles, via subscription on Switch consoles and it's on the Mega Drive Mini. If you're after a PAL PlayStation alternative, *CT Special Forces* isn't nearly as chaotic but can be found for under £20, or you can opt for *Metal Slug X* which is better but also more expensive, with eBay prices starting from £60.

» [PlayStation] Axel leaps over a flaming salvo while his homing weapon deals damage to the boss.

» [PlayStation] Combat mechs in the factory? We're not so sure about the safety regulations here.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Sony's apparent lack of interest in reissuing *Rapid Reload* means that you'll have to pay up if you want it on your shelf, and while it's a good game, you can definitely spend less to get better run-and-guns. If you're committed to going for it and you've got the choice, get the Japanese version – you'll miss out on the story, and there's really not much of that to miss out on, but it's cheaper, gives you infinite continues and has a level select cheat.

# I'VE GOT IT!

### These readers were on target

**Kara Jane Adams**
I picked up the PAL version with the PlayStation at launch (I think just before Future Zone switched to Electronics Boutique), because despite the negative press to an old-school 2D run-and-gun on Sony's new 3D powerhouse, it looked like the kind of thing I enjoyed. I was happy with my decision.

**Andreas Jervström**
I had a copy that I bought from Book-Off in Kyoto back in 2012. Paid around ¥3,500 back then and I bought the game because it looked awesome.

**Zocksofa**
Bought my copy years ago for under ¥1,000. At this time the PAL version was around €150. Good for me, that I always prefer Japanese versions. Most used copies of *Gunners Heaven* are missing the Obi.

**Audi Sorlie**
I bought it at launch for PAL for €60 or so in today's money. I bought *Gunner's Heaven* when I worked in Japan for like five bucks.

**Stefan Berendes**
It's crazy how expensive this is nowadays! When I bought the PAL version on eBay years ago, the postage was almost more expensive than the actual game!

**Tim Surman**
I've never heard of *Rapid Reload* before now, so I just tried it. It's okay... not a brilliant game and I'm guessing (like most things) it is now expensive because it didn't sell in great numbers.

# MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

## PHOTO MODE

**Delving through the family album has rekindled fond memories for Nick**

**About a year ago, I needed to print a shipping label for work.** No big deal, right? Wrong. Ever since our last day in the office back in 2020, I simply hadn't needed to print anything, so I didn't own a printer.

Fortunately, my sister had a printer she'd been keeping in storage since she left university, so I only had to pay for some new ink cartridges – and better yet, the integrated scanner allowed me to finally get on with scanning our family photos, which I'd wanted to do for a very long time. If you've been reading for a while, you've probably seen one particular photo of me receiving a Master System II for my birthday (the first of many), but I found enough other gaming-related photos that I thought it would be fun to share some in the magazine.

There are some pretty predictable themes within the collection – if you know me, you'll be unsurprised to learn that there's a lot of *Sonic* there. Others paint a picture of who I am and how I play. The one with me in the *Hard Drivin'* cabinet shows that my fascination with videogames started from an early age, and the one with me and my younger sister playing *Final Lap R* is a great example of how I become rather locked in and focussed during gaming sessions. Our former production editor Drew Sleep took the photo of me playing *Metal Slug* in the office, and it's on the Neo Geo MVS board that I bought and repaired, because I do love to tinker.

Others just make me laugh. In a Retro Revival on *Ridge Racer Revolution* in issue 219, I confessed to not being a fan of the beach, and there's one photo here that shows that I never have been. There I am on the beach, totally engrossed in playing a puzzle game, showing signs of growing into an adult that would use *Puyo Puyo Tetris* as a means of torturing friends and colleagues. What you don't see is that there are plenty of other photos that demonstrate my complete refusal to engage with the beach at all, as I go from standing to squatting, and eventually reluctantly sitting down on a towel, all while playing that handheld. The photos also highlight our family's circumstances – the photos were taken at Jaywick, which isn't a tremendously swish place, and I was playing a dedicated 'Block Game' handheld because we couldn't afford a Game Boy.

> "The one with me in a Hard Drivin' cabinet shows that my fascination with videogames started early"

**There's one particular photo that rolls up happy and sad memories together, from Christmas Day 2002.** We opened presents at home that morning and then went to visit my grandad, as it would be our last opportunity to come together and celebrate a holiday he always enjoyed. It was a reality that none of us wanted to acknowledge, but which proved impossible to ignore because his condition was such that he only had days left to live. Anticipating that we would likely come home in a sombre mood, my mum had kept back a final surprise present each for my sister and I. Mine was the GameCube, the first console I'd ever received within its UK launch year – the right gift to create a moment of genuine happiness during a really difficult time.

Really, authentic emotion is one aspect of these photos that stands out to me, as I've long been self-conscious about the way I look when I smile. Visiting Sega Amusements Europe was a real thrill for me, as I was there representing Arcade Heroes on my first ever official press trip, yet I couldn't muster anything more than my normal weird look when I took a photo there. But take a look at the photo from Summer Of Sonic 2009 where I'm having a blast playing *Mario Kart DS* with my friends, and the one where I'm interviewing Yu Suzuki in 2019 – in both of those photos, you can see me smiling broadly in a way that only happens when I let my emotional guard down and enjoy myself, which is legitimately quite a rare sight when a camera is around.

Videogames aren't my only love in life, but they have undeniably shaped my life in a considerable way – I owe so many of my good memories, my friendships and of course my career to this hobby. As I work my way through so many photos of school plays, holidays and that one birthday party where my aunt caused chaos by pretending to be a Dalek, it's nice to see that the people around me recognised what videogames mean to me, and have left me a record of how I grew up with them.

### MISSING MEMORIES

THE MOMENTS I WISH HAD BEEN CAPTURED FOR POSTERITY

**CHRISTMAS 1997**
We still talk about the day that three generations of the Thorpe family raced on *Micro Machines 96*.

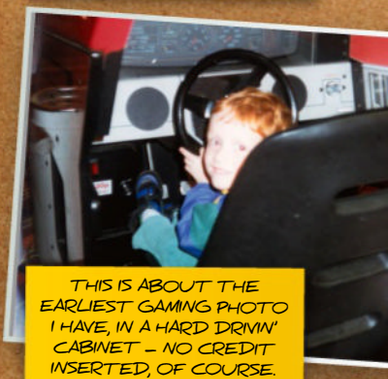
**SEGA WORLD**
I visited the London Trocadero location in 1999, but if any photos were taken, we certainly don't have them.

**PLAYSTATION EXPERIENCE**
The 2003 Earl's Court show was my first time meeting friends I'd made online, including one of my very best friends.

**STUDY BREAK**
The University Of Essex had a pretty good little arcade, where I spent more time and money than I should have.

**MOTION MADNESS**
We played so much *Wii Sports* and *Mario Kart* in my final year at university, I'm surprised there are no photos.

I LOVE THIS PHOTO, AND I LOVE THAT MY MUM WAS SO AMUSED THAT SHE GOT QUITE A FEW OTHERS LIKE IT.



THIS IS ABOUT THE EARLIEST GAMING PHOTO I HAVE, IN A HARD DRIVIN' CABINET – NO CREDIT INSERTED, OF COURSE.

I KEPT THE NEO GEO MVS IN THE OFFICE AFTER REPAIRING IT, FOR LUNCHTIME GAMES OF WINDJAMMERS.

SURPRISINGLY, I WAS ACTUALLY INTERVIEWING YU SUZUKI FOR EDGE RATHER THAN RETRO GAMER ON THIS OCCASION.
I FOUND A DIFFERENT PHOTO OF ME GETTING THAT MASTER SYSTEM II! ONE WHERE I'M BLINKING, MIND.
SONIC WAS EVERYTHING TO ME AS A KID – I PLAYED THE GAMES, READ THE COMICS, WATCHED THE CARTOONS AND EVEN WORE THE CLOTHES.
THE FIRST GAME I GOT WITH THE GAMECUBE WAS SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE, WHICH WAS A GREAT CHOICE.
IN BETWEEN MARIO KART DS SESSIONS AT SUMMER OF SONIC 2009, WITH HARRY (LEFT), MIKE (IN THE HAT) AND MARC (RIGHT).
MY SISTER AND I PLAY FINAL LAP R – THIS WAS ON A LATER HOLIDAY, ALSO IN JAYWICK.
ME, MY RUBBISH NON-SMILE, AND A WEIRD 180-DEGREE CURL IN MY HAIR. SEGA RALLY 3 WAS GOOD THOUGH.
SEGA
amusements europe

# MISSED SHOTS

## Readers share the moments they wish they'd caught on camera

**Chris Hodges**
The one E3 that I went to was E3 2005. And I was lucky enough to get a picture with none other than Shigeru Miyamoto! Imagine my heartbreak when I looked at the camera afterwards to see that, for whatever reason, the picture didn't turn out and there was just a black screen instead. At least I still had the moment...

**RJ Frazer**
Me and school friends playing *Atomic Bomberman* on a PC. Four kids using a single keyboard together for simultaneous multiplayer mayhem, the room was as chaotic as the game!

**Mathew Kumar**
I wish I had photos of gaming culture in Malaysia/Singapore in the Nineties. Arcades like Sega Satellite and WyWy Wonderspace. Bootleg Famicoms at Jaya Jusco. Poly bagged copied PC games at Sim Lim Tower. As a child I never thought to record it, as an adult, I regret that no one seems to have.

**Beil³**
I'd love to see the crowds around the *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat* coin-ops, at the height of their popularity.

**Overlord**
A shot of all my C64 games. One of them was the first game I ever played and I've long since forgotten the title. No way to play it again as it stands...

**Neswulf**
Getting an N64 in 1997 and playing *GoldenEye* and *Super Mario 64* constantly. I was absolutely blown away by them. *GoldenEye* multiplayer in particular with my brother and sister.

**Adam**
When I got a Mega Drive for Christmas. I asked for a football game for the NES but got *Mega Games* with *World Cup Italia 90* on it. I said to my nan she'd bought the wrong one and then a big box came out. I opened it and it was a Mega Drive and I was so shocked. Best Christmas present ever.

# MAILBAG

**HAVE YOUR SAY...** SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

## WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!

» [3DS] Nintendo has already converted *Luigi's Mansion* once, so we can easily see it making the move to the Switch 2 at some point.

» *Black Mirror* is just one of many successful projects Charlie Brooker has worked on since leaving *PC Zone*.

## LOVING LUIGI

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I started picking up your magazine every now and then when some of your awesome covers caught my eye while at my local supermarket. As someone who has quite the collection of retro consoles, mini consoles and games (from Nintendo to Evercade) I'm not sure why I wasn't a subscriber already. Now that I'm subscribed, I love the surprise of opening the post every month to see which game or console is featured on the cover. Has *Luigi's Mansion* (my all-time favourite game) ever been featured on the cover before? I have a sneaky suspicion it might arrive on the Switch 2 soon as it's almost Halloween. There's not a month goes by where I don't end up with a list of games I want to check out or hunt down. (Sometimes I discover I have it already on an Evercade cartridge.) Keep up the great work at giving all the great retro games the spotlight they deserve.
Ciaran Rice

**We're glad you're enjoying the magazine, Ciaran. We've not done a *Luigi's Mansion* cover before, but if we could get interview access we'd certainly consider it.**

## STAR LETTER

## CRANKING IT UP

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Can you please run an article on the Playdate? I know it's not a retro system, but it does have a lot of retro-styled games that mechanically play like old classics. It has a delightful old-school screen as well (how many other modern handhelds need a light on so you can play them at night?) and the crank has allowed developers to innovate on the system in a number of clever ways. I think another aspect to consider about the machine is that it has a strong developer-based community that reflects bedroom coding of the Eighties, so I feel it's a system that's well worth investigating. I'd love an in-depth look at the machine and hardware itself, but even a look at its best games would make me happy. I know Darran is a fan of the machine thanks to his posts on social media, so it would be great if you could make something happen.
James Hampton

**Thanks for writing in, James. Darran is indeed a big fan of the Playdate and agrees that there's plenty of retro angles you can explore with it. We'll reach out to a few people and see what we can do. Enjoy a book while you wait.**

» [Playdate] A *Pokémon*-style RPG where you collect photos of birds? Of course Darran owns it.

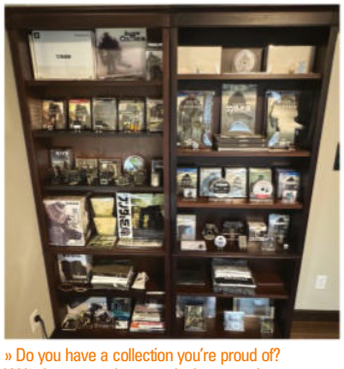
## CRAFTING OPTIONS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Thank you so much for your great magazine. Magazine Craft and Covermount Corner belong to my favourite sections. I love going through old gaming mags, and maybe even prefer it over playing the games themselves, as it brings back great memories without having to invest time in getting games to run correctly etc. As a PC gamer from the Nineties I was hoping you could interview Charlie Brooker of *PC Zone* or Garry Whitta from *PC Gamer*, especially since they had some very interesting careers afterward. Thanks and keep up the good work!
Prof Dr JFA Jansen

**We're glad you're enjoying Magazine Craft and Covermount Corner, they're both proving to be extremely popular with readers. Both Charlie Brooker and Garry Whitta would make ideal candidates, so we'll try and track them down.**

## A COLOSSUS COLLECTION

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
My name is Shawn Reed and I'm a longtime reader and huge fan of the magazine and I live in Mount Vernon, Ohio. I have a sizeable collection of games and memorabilia related to one particular interest of mine: Team Ico games. I took some pictures of it, and wanted to see if you'd be interested in putting it in Collector's Corner. As someone with the collecting gene firmly embedded in my DNA, Collector's Corner is my favourite section of the magazine, and I love that you've been doing it for so long. Between the *Ico* article in issue



» Do you have a collection you're proud of? Write in to us and we can look at covering it in the magazine.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK retrogamermag.bsky.social Retro Gamer Magazine @RetroGamerMag @RetroGamer_Mag

# CONTACT US

**Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer,
Future Publishing, Quay House,
The Ambury, Bath,
Somerset, BA1 1UA

**Email:** retrogamer@futurenet.com

» [PC] The new version of *Wild Guns* supports up to four players.

256, and putting *Ico* at #62 and *Shadow Of The Colossus* at #67 in the Greatest Retro Games special, I know you folks love these games too.

Again, I adore the magazine and look forward to it every month.

All the best,
Shawn Reed

**We've printed Shawn's letter as this is how collectors of Collector's Corner typically reach out to us. We'll be showcasing Shawn's collection in an upcoming issue, so if you've got a collection of your own that you'd like to share with other readers, take the plunge like Shawn and drop us an email.**

## GUNNING TO PLAY

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I'm trying to track down an old game I used to enjoy playing at my friend's house. It was either on the Mega Drive or SNES and it played like *Blood Brothers*, but featured giant robots. It was a two-player game and you could play as someone who looked like Clint Eastwood. I thought it was *Sunset Riders*, but it definitely isn't that. Please help, as I'd love to play it again.

Barry Turner

**Hi Barry, we're pretty confident that the game mentioned is *Wild Guns*. While it's now very expensive to own on the SNES, an updated version is available on modern systems, which is great fun.**

## DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

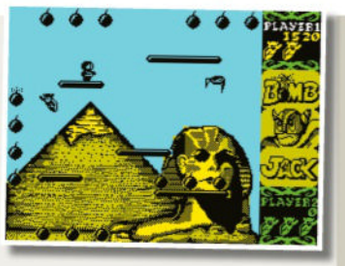
### Holidays

It's that time of the year when the team likes to take some time off. Nick had a lovely time in Devon with members of his family, while Darran packed up his Steam Deck and headed off to Lanzarote for a few days of sunshine and played the new *Heretic* remaster. Tim caught up with family members, while Andy stayed at home and caught up on a number of films, including Ice Cube's *War Of The Worlds*. We feel Andy drew the short straw out of all of us.

# Your say

**Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…**

## What's your favourite Elite Systems game?




» [ZX Spectrum] *Bomb Jack* on the Spectrum is great fun so it's not surprising so many readers have mentioned it.

**Dan Tootill**
*Roller Coaster*! Essentially *Jet Set Willy* set in a theme park, but its engine was more refined. Very slick and responsive. The best part? Functioning rides that you had to jump on to reach other parts of the map and collect the objects.

**Davey Sloan**
I assume this is for a two word article that simply says *Bomb Jack*.

**Lord Arse!**
Really tough question. I loved the charismatic time-hopping *Kokotoni Wilf*, the excellent arcade conversion of *Bomb Jack*, and the mind-numbingly difficult challenge that was *Airwolf*. But for me, *Buggy Boy* tops the lot. It was brilliant fun on my Atari ST!

**zx_spectrum_30**
*Bomb Jack* – it looked fantastic and was balanced, being challenging but playable.

**Arthur Strong**
*Ikari Warriors* on the Amstrad was fantastic. It was the first game I played on Christmas 1986. Its really colourful arcade-like graphics distinguished it from the other 8-bit conversions.

**Barry Howells**
*Ghost 'N Goblins* on the C64. It has great graphics and great music and was a really good arcade conversion.

**Simon Cowley**
*Buggy Boy* on C64 really nailed the feeling of the arcade and felt very replayable. It was a real joy to play.

**OhMyGames!**
I'm going for *Bomb Jack*. I played it in arcades and the Spectrum version was ridiculously accurate, considering the hardware!

**MysticalMachineGun**
I spent a lot of my childhood C64 time with *Buggy Boy*. It was the first racing game that I actually got good with, rather than cheating and having no timer or infinite lives.

**dunktech**
*Commando* was/is so addictive. It's closely followed by *Paperboy* and then *Frank Bruno's Boxing*.

**Robb from 8/16/32bit**
I've got a massive soft spot for the Spectrum version of *Ghosts 'N Goblins*. Probably because it was the first game I received when I got my beloved Speccy.

retro GAMER

**Future PLC** Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

**Editorial**
Editor **Darran 'Kokotoni Wilf' Jones**
darran.jones@futurenet.com
Art Editor **Andy 'Striker' Salter**
Production Editor **Tim 'Buggy Boy' Empey**
Features Editor **Nick 'Batty' Thorpe**
Group Art Director **Woz 'Ikari Warriors' Brown**
Editorial Director **Tony 'Bomb Jack' Mott**

**Cover image**
©Sega, ©Creative Assembly

**Contributors**
**Writing** Adam Barnes, Martyn Carroll, Sean Cole, David Crookes, Andrew Fisher, Faith Johnson, Paul Kautz, James Konik, Iain Lee, Graeme Mason, Mike Mika, Rory Milne, Thomas Nickel, Paul Rose, James Tocchio

**Design** Ryan Robbins

**Advertising**
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
**clare.dove@futurenet.com**
Account Director **Kevin Stoddart**
**kevin.stoddart@futurenet.com**

**International**
Retro Gamer is available for licensing and syndication. To find out more contact us at **licensing@futurenet.com** or view our available content at **www.futurecontenthub.com** .
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**

**Subscriptions**
Email enquiries **help@magazinesdirect.com**
Subscription enquiries **www.mymagazine.co.uk/FAQ**
Online orders **magazinesdirect.com**
Consumer Revenues Director **Sharon Todd**

**Subscription delays:** Disruption issues are currently affecting UK and international delivery networks. Please allow up to seven days before contacting us about a late delivery via help@magazinesdirect.com

**Circulation**
Circulation Manager **Matthew de Lima**

**Production**
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Clare Scott**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Advertising Production Coordinator **Emma Thomas**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Controller **Vivienne Calvert**

**Management**
Managing Director, Games and Ents **Matthew Pierce**
Global Art Director **Rodney Dive**
SVP Consumer **Kevin Addley**

**Printed by** William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

**Distributed by** Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk. For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

**ISSN 1742-3155**

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards. The manufacturing paper mill holds full FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification and accreditation

All contents © 2025 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Kevin Li Ying**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial Officer **Sharjeel Suleman**
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

ipso. Regulated

**GPSR EU RP (for authorities only)**
**eucomply OÜ Pärnu mnt 139b-14 11317**
**Tallinn, Estonia**
**hello@eucompliancepartner.com**
**+3375690241**

Widely Recycled

***General Product Safety 2023/988: The use of our product under normal or reasonably foreseeable conditions of use, including the actual duration of use, does not present any risk or only the minimum risks compatible with the product's use, which are considered acceptable and consistent with a high level of protection of the health and safety of consumers.***

# YOUR GAME IS NOT OVER

## CONTINUE?

## [Y]/[Y]

**Yes! You can continue the games you grew up with.**
No setup drama, no compatibility issues — just install and play.
Your favorite classics run smoothly on GOG.
Relive the magic. Own the moment.

Use code **RETROGOG20 for -20%** off your first purchase.

Offer valid until December 31st, 2025!

gog.com

>>LOAD 278

# nextmonth

ON SALE 23RD OCTOBER 2025

## THE MAKING OF OPERATION WOLF

HOW A LOVE OF COMICS AND MOVIES LIKE COMMANDO AND RAMBO INSPIRED TAITO'S GARGANTUAN ARCADE HIT

**AND MUCH MORE, INCLUDING...**

Atlantis, The Great Escape, Lumines, Magicland Dizzy, Covermount Corner, Simon The Sorcerer, Kill.switch, Steve Jarratt, James Bond 007: Nightfire, Banjo-Kazooie, Homebrew

SCORE
EVEL
02
RATE
03
HAINS
00
SAME SHAPE
COLUMN
COLUMN
COLUMN
x2
AC3
ADERS
TR3ME

# Space Invaders Extreme

## MAKING SPACE FOR THE CLASSICS

» PSP » 2008 » TAITO

**When I first started having to contemplate a career, back in the mid-Noughties, I thought I'd never be able to write about games for a living.** My tastes didn't seem to fit in – sure, I liked plenty of stuff that drew critical praise, but I also liked arcade games, 2D games and other things that were deeply unfashionable at the time. Thankfully the situation started to change, and I think that's partially down to games like *Pac-Man Championship Edition* and *Space Invaders Extreme*. Both games managed to retain the core gameplay of the classic incarnations while adding a modern twist, and earned praise for doing so.

The funny thing is, *Space Invaders* was simple to grasp but *Space Invaders Extreme* had loads going on. Sure, the game includes bosses, enemies with shields and reflectors and lots of bonus rounds, but that's just the start of it. You've got to pay attention to the colours of the enemies you're shooting to get power-ups, and different combinations trigger different bonus stages. The background shows that you can get bonuses for not only picking off enemies of the same colour, but also shooting down rows and columns of enemies, and enemies of the same shape. It feels like a *Space Invaders* game made for the kinds of people who get deep into the weeds when exploring shoot-'em-up scoring systems.

I find it fascinating that Taito and Namco both had the same goal of updating a beloved arcade classic for modern score attack play, and ended up in such radically different places. *Space Invaders Extreme* is really for the sickos, in a strictly positive sense, whereas *Pac-Man Championship Edition* is intuitive enough that just about any player should understand what's necessary to score highly. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter too much as I love them both – and more importantly, they did their job of reigniting love for the classics in other players.

# ENDGAME

## KONAMI KRAZY RACERS

» In the early Nineties, Nintendo pulled together a bunch of Mario characters and had them race each other. A couple of years later, Sega did the same with the Sonic cast, and Naughty Dog did it with Crash Bandicoot in 1999. So when Konami decided to do a kart racer, it must have brought in all of its most recognisable stars, right? Let's skip to the end and see...

01

» Hey, it's Shiori Fujisaki from *Tokimeki Memorial*! You know her, right? Wait, you don't because it never got an English release? Oh. Well, you probably at least recognise Goemon.

02

» It's Gray Fox, *Metal Gear Solid*'s cyborg ninja. Apparently, Snake wanted too much money. He's accompanied by Nyami and Mimi from *Pop'n Music*. Wait, you don't know them either?

03

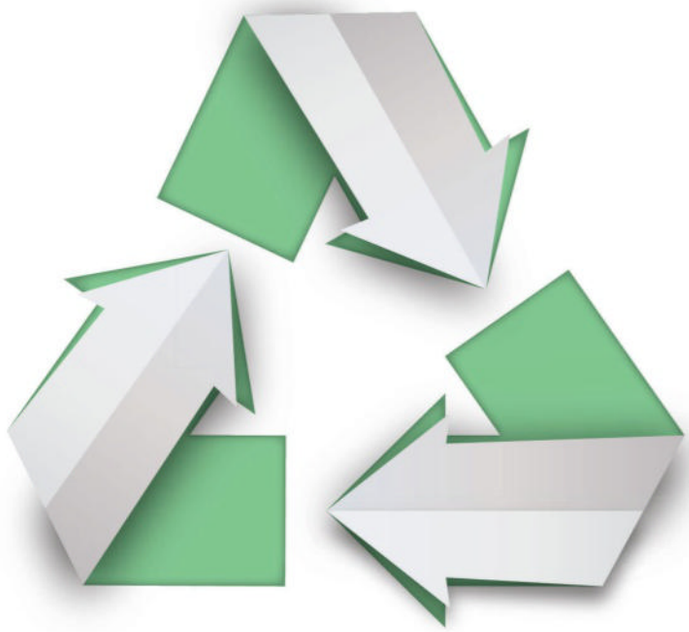
» Everybody knows Dracula. Unfortunately, *Castlevania*'s main villain doesn't know that you can't get blood from a stone, as he unleashes the bats on the Moai heads from *Gradius*.

04

» Power Pro-kun arrives, years before the baseball games he hails from ever left Japan. Whoops. Takosuke from *Parodius* gets licked by a dog, and judging by the look on his face, the poor eight-limbed guy is enjoying that experience about as much as Nick or Darran would.

05

» The final group shot shows King from *Pop'n Music*, Vic Viper from *Gradius*, Beartank from *Rakugakids*, and Ebisumaru from *Mystical Ninja*. We'd have probably put Sparkster in it, he's a cool little guy. Having said that, we would have put Penta from *Penguin Adventure* in it too. He's recognisable, right?



# PAPER REVOLUTION

74% of paper and 83% of paper-based packaging is recycled into new products; one of the highest recycling rates of any material in Europe!

Sources: Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI), 2020 and Eurostat, 2018.
Europe: EU27 + Norway, Switzerland and the UK.

Discover the story of paper
**www.lovepaper.org**

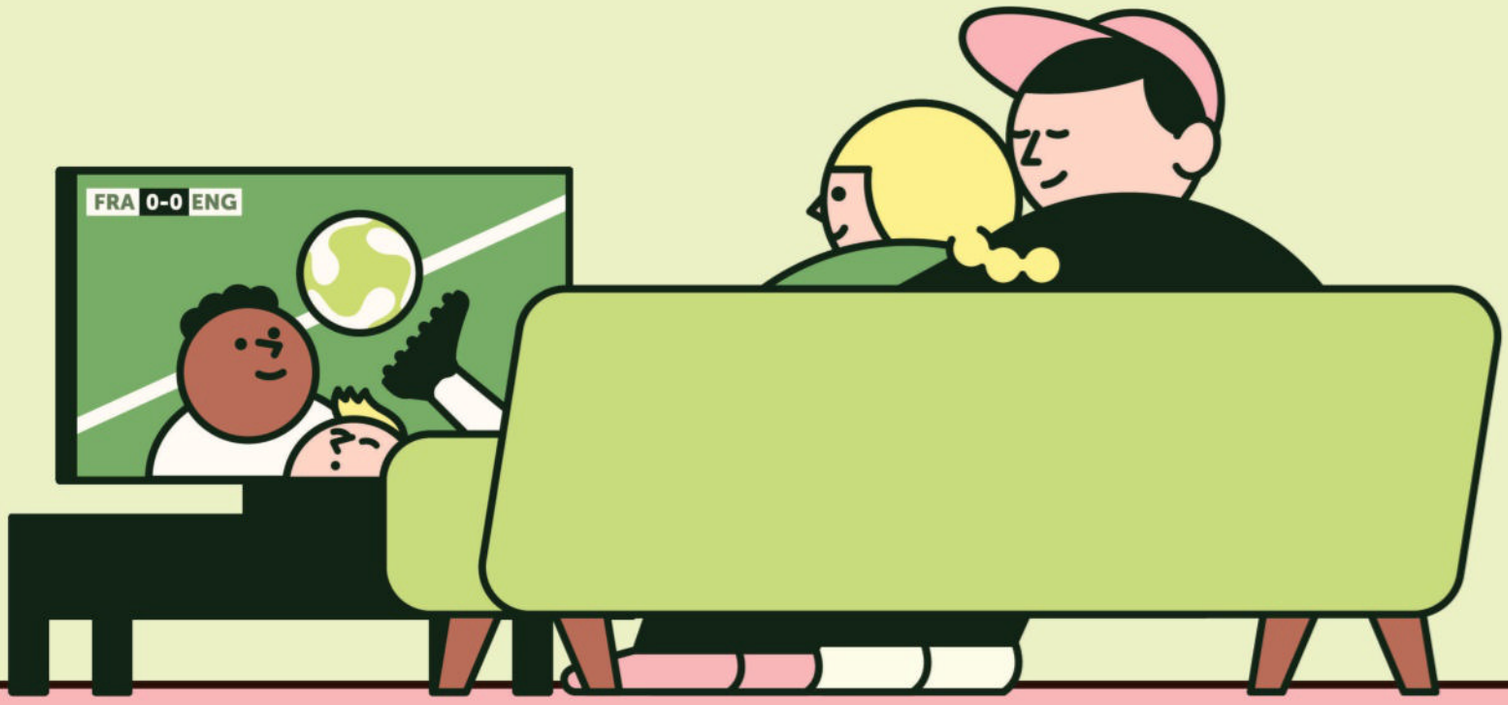
Scan for paper facts, activities, blogs and much more!

LOVE PAPER®

Advertisement

GO. COMPARE

# SAVVY SPENDING STARTS AT HOME




From leaky taps to locked doors,
**scan here for home cover options.**